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# Lowell the Political Satirist: A Study of His Use of Literature as a Medium for His Political Thought, 1846-1867

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LOWELL THE POLITICAL SATIRIST: A STUDY OF HIS USE OF LITERATURE  
AS A MEDIUM FOR HIS POLITICAL THOUGHT

1846-1867

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION -- THE LOWELL CLAN

To the average student of American literature the name Lowell conjures up memories of "The Vision of Sir Launfal" or of "Patterns," for to him the name signifies only the two poets James Russell Lowell and his cousin Amy. If he has heard of the Lowell Institute or of the Massachusetts town of that name, he associates these too with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets. The name, however, takes on a new significance when examined in the light of what may well be called the "Lowell clan." This is especially true in a study of James Russell Lowell as a political satirist, for he is the mouthpiece of the Lowellian mind on matters political.

Unlike the Pilgrims, who left England to find religious freedom, the Lowells left Bristol, England, to insure mercantile freedom to their clan. It was Sir Percival who made the first Lowell settlement in Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1639. He and the three generations that followed him were concerned primarily with the establishment of the family in New England. Not until the Reverend John Lowell (1704-1767), the great-grandson of Sir Percival's son John, appeared in the pulpit of the Unitarian church at Newburyport in 1725, did the prestige that was to be its heritage for more than two centuries descend upon the family.

The first Lowell to enjoy a college education, the Reverend John Lowell was known throughout his pastoral career as a man of broad sympathies.



eralist, utterly opposed to the Louisiana purchase on the ground that it would ruin the United States by extending the power of the slave-holding, agricultural South. He was the first Lowell to turn to polemic writing. Before and during the War of 1812 he wrote pamphlets advocating conciliation with England.<sup>4</sup>

It was John Amory Lowell (1798-1881), the Rebel's son, who brought the family to the pinnacle of success. Himself a successful merchant and banker, and treasurer of four cotton mills, he was to exert a lasting influence on education and literature as trustee of the Athenaeum, member of the Harvard Corporation, and sole trustee of the Lowell Institute. In the last-named capacity he may well be called the Maecenas of American adult education, for although he did not endow the Institute, it was he who organized and launched the great undertaking that made the foundation famous.<sup>5</sup>

His son John (1824-1897) reverted to the legal career of his great-grandfather. Like his ancestors a bitter opponent of slavery, he "printed a devastating criticism of the Dred Scott decision which may have been in Abraham Lincoln's mind when in March, 1865, he appointed him, his last judicial selection, to the Federal District Court."<sup>6</sup>

The second Lowell line descended from the Judge — the Cabot-Jackson line — had little direct bearing on James Russell Lowell the political satirist. All the interests of Francis Cabot Lowell (1775-1817) centered in the mills which he opened in Massachusetts and which not only revolutionized New England

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4 Cf. ibid., 118-145.

5 Cf. ibid., 233-235.

6 Ibid., 263.

industry but likewise stabilized the Lowell finances and made it possible for his eldest son, known as "John Junior" (1799-1836), to enrich posterity with the Lowell Institute. Had John Junior devoted himself to writing, he would probably have produced political tracts of no mean power, for in the journal he kept while making the Grand Tour, he made the following almost prophetic entry on December 1, 1833:

America in the days of our grand-children will be grand; and in those of our great-great-grand-children [Greenslet remarks in his footnote that this would be in 1950] perhaps the scene of great actions, and the mistress of nations; if she can only remain united. This is the only point of our national existence about which I feel the slightest anxiety. Her enlightened and above all a moral people, which I trust we are, may suffer for a time but can never long remain subject to a very bad government; but if we are to be divided, the fate of Italy, of Germany, or at least of ancient Greece will be our fate. Her aggregation of tyrannical democracies, a many headed monster without one directing soul, a mean congregation of declamatory demagogues, an association of all that is ignoble, calumnious [sic], base, and weak will pollute with their incessant broils the broad valley of the Mississippi, and even profane the beautiful hills and streams and plains of the descendants of the pilgrims.

It was from the third Lowell line -- the Russell-Spence line -- that James Russell Lowell was descended. His father, the Reverend Charles Lowell (1782-1861), was the Old Judge's son by his third wife, Rebecca Russell Tyng. The poet describes his father as "Doctor Primrose in the comparative degree, forever praising the old Federalist Party with George Washington at its head, or speaking of Jefferson as harshly as his kind heart would let him speak of anybody."<sup>8</sup> Mild and self-controlled as the parson was, his anti-slavery tendencies led to the only outburst of rage remembered in his household -- when he

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7 Ibid., 203-204.

8 Quoted in ibid., 243.

read his newspaper announcing the capitulation of the North to the South in the Missouri Compromise.<sup>9</sup>

Independence of thought coupled with a clannish conservatism, love of freedom and hatred of slavery, instinctive concern for all that affected the well-being of the United States and particularly of their native New England — these were the outstanding characteristics of the Lowells from the days of Sir Percival onward. James Russell Lowell, the youngest of Charles's six children, was the embodiment of all these qualities. From the time of his graduation from Harvard until the death of his wife in 1853, his independence of thought and his militant abolitionism apparently turned him away from the Brahmin paths of the clan. After 1853 and particularly after his appointment as minister to England, the clannish conservatism of the Lowells became a paramount factor in his life. His was one of the most versatile careers in the history of American literature: he was poet, journalist, professor, lecturer, critic, diplomat. His ancestry and his environment exerted a profound influence on his attitudes. Indeed, Vernon Parrington believes that "he was no more than an echo of other minds."<sup>10</sup> But whatever Lowell's weaknesses, one thing is certain: throughout his literary career, his pen constantly responded to the needs of the nation.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Everett Hale, James Russell Lowell and His Friends, Boston, [1899], 8.

<sup>10</sup> The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860, New York, 1927, 462. Parrington declares: "Sensitive to change, he was rarely self-reliant; generous in sympathies, he was timid in convictions. He was no Come-outer to stand alone against the world, but unconsciously he took color from his environment and was always glad to find a staff to lean on. It was fortunate for his peace of mind that he never realized how frequently he was no more than an echo of other minds; yet the confusions and contradictions that mark off the several

If ever a Lowell lived up to the family motto, "Occasionem cognosce — Seize your opportunity," it was James Russell Lowell. His patriotism was "the enduring passion of his life,"<sup>11</sup> and though he himself stressed the value of his work as poet, it is in the field of political writing that he has won enduring fame.

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periods of his life can be explained in no other way. From Brahminism he drifted to radicalism, and from radicalism back to a modified Brahminism; and these changes resulted from no native intellectual unfolding, but from certain dominant personalities who drew him aside from his natural orbit."

But see also William Rose Benét, "Lowell, and Liberty," Saturday Review of Literature, XXV, December 12, 1942, 20:

"Conservative old Boston family the Lowells! Yes? They happened to develop one of the most rebellious fighters for poetry in our own time, an astronomer of considerable imagination, and, in James Russell Lowell, a writer who was never afraid to speak out, in no uncertain terms, for what he believed to be right. Over and above that, his conception of Freedom was anything but static and hidebound:

We are not free: Freedom doth not consist  
In musing with our faces toward the Past,  
While petty cares, and crawling interests, twist  
Their spider-threads about us, which at last  
Grow strong as iron chains, to cramp and bind  
In formal narrowness heart, soul, and mind.  
Freedom is recreated year by year,  
In hearts wide open on the Godward side..."

<sup>11</sup> James Russell Lowell, The Anti-Slavery Papers of James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1902, I, ix.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PLACE OF POLITICAL SATIRE

#### IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

Lowell was unconsciously uttering a prophecy when he wrote to Charles F. Briggs in December, 1848: "I am the first poet who has endeavored to express the American Idea, and I shall be popular by and by."<sup>1</sup> Freedom, the fundamental American Idea, was the theme of all his political writings, both verse and prose. His prose articles and much of his political verse are for the most part practically unknown to the average student of American literature. His political satires, however, have given him an eminence that will not readily be superseded by the fame of any other writer. A general survey of Lowell's political writings will provide a background for an understanding and appreciation of his satires.

Lowell's philosophy of life, from the time of his graduation from Harvard until his death in 1891, may be divided into three phases. During the first, which ended with the death of his wife in 1853, he was humanitarian in his outlook, interested in abolition, and devoting most of his energy to it. The second phase was an outgrowth of the first; slavery had become the remote issue on which the very existence of the Union depended, and Lowell's pen was

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<sup>1</sup> James Russell Lowell, The Letters of James Russell Lowell, edited by Charles Eliot Norton, New York, 1893, I, 148.

dedicated to the nationalist side of the Civil War. Once the question of the preservation of the Union had been decided, Lowell's philosophy of life became definitely humanistic. During the last twenty years of his life he was constantly stressing the need of integration between the past and the present, for he believed that the advantages of the past must be made to bear upon the new conditions of the present.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that Lowell's writings usually had some bearing on the body politic, though his interest in politics was never that of a politician. "I always hated politics, in the ordinary sense of the word," he declares, "and I am not likely to grow fonder of them, now that I have learned how rare it is to find a man who can keep principle clear from party and personal prejudice, or can conceive the possibility of another's doing so."<sup>3</sup> For Lowell, interest in politics meant devotion to some principle for the common weal. That is why he never advocated doctrines of expediency, but those of downright frankness and honesty. Many of his political essays, though they were for the most part on the subject of slavery, were incisive studies of the character of such men as Webster, Clay, and Calhoun. "The larger the man, the more thoroughly interested was he in penetrating the man's words and deeds, and seeking to come at the bottom of facts of his nature."<sup>4</sup>

Even before he met Maria White, who was to have so profound an in-

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2 Harry Hayden Clark, "Lowell: Humanitarian, Nationalist, or Humanist?" *Studies in Philology*, XXVII, July, 1930, 429-435.

3 James Russell Lowell, The Biglow Papers, 5th edition, Boston, 1891, 281.

4 Horace Elisha Scudder, James Russell Lowell, *A Biography*, Boston, 1901, I, 219.

fluence on his thought and writings, Lowell's sympathies were anti-slavery. In view of his ancestry this fact is not surprising. As early as 1838 the nineteen-year-old poet expressed his views rather definitely in a letter to G. B. Loring:

As for the two great parties which divide this country, I for one dare to say that democracy does belong to neither of them, and certainly to neither exclusively — so I care not which whips. The The Van Burenites have the stoutest lungs and shout loudly of "Jeffersonian democracy," but fail and softly wins the race. A third party, or rather no party, are secretly rising up in this country, whose voice will soon be heard. The Abolitionists are the only ones with whom I sympathize of the present extant parties.<sup>5</sup>

It was Maria White, however, who was responsible for the young dilettante's dedication to the abolitionist cause and for the first full flowering of his native ability. Lowell became acquainted with Maria, the sister of one of his classmates, in 1840. The young couple soon became engaged, and throughout their long courtship as well as after their marriage Maria was the motivating power behind Lowell's pen. She was the leader of a group of young people known as the "Band," who rendered the poet a triple service. In the first place, they provided him with an appreciative audience for his wit, and thus helped him out of the shadows of the preceding three years. Secondly, they gave him an opportunity to expatiate upon his literary plans to a sympathetic circle. Finally — and this was their most important service — their companionship quickened, deepened, and defined his humanitarian impulses in a way that would scarcely have been possible through the influence of a single girl.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Letters, I, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ferris Greenslet, James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1905, 40-43.

By 1846 Lowell had been wholly converted to the abolitionist cause. Nevertheless he did not overestimate his services to that cause. Writing to Sydney Gay in 1848, he declared:

I, for one, came into the anti-slavery ranks after the chief burthen and heat of the day were over, and I would always bear in mind that excellent saying of old Fuller, that "there is more required to make one valiant man than to call Cronmer and Jewell coward," as if the fire in Smithfield had been no hotter than what is painted in the Book of Martyrs. There is in this the unerring wisdom of a kind heart. Yet I would qualify it with another of the same author: "One may be a lamb in private wrongs, but in hearing general affronts to goodness, they are asses which are not lions."<sup>7</sup>

In devoting himself to abolitionism, Lowell found an outlet for that vague spirit of reform which, as early as 1843, had prompted him to join Robert Carter in projecting a new but short-lived Boston literary magazine.<sup>8</sup> That same spirit made him conceive of the vocation of the poet as that of seer and interpreter. But what was he himself to interpret? As he contemplated the condition of slaves in the United States, he was confronted with a denial of the fundamental American idea of freedom. He determined to make freedom the burden of his song and to preach a gospel of reform that would restore both oppressed and oppressor.<sup>9</sup> All his work for the abolitionist cause, whether in prose or in verse, was an attempt to convey his gospel of reform to the America of his day. The great bulk of it is practically unknown; indeed, Lowell himself did not consider it worth publishing in the Riverside edition of his works. Yet it forms an illuminating background for his political satires.

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7 Letters, I, 123-124.

8 Cf. Scudder, Lowell, I, 100-102.

9 Letters, I, 104-105.



Most of Lowell's anti-slavery articles were published in the Anti-Slavery Standard, but he also made contributions to other journals. In his "Stanzas on Freedom," sung at the anti-slavery picnic at Dedham on August 1, 1843, he had declared:

They are slaves who fear to speak  
For the fallen and the weak;  
They are slaves who will not choose  
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,  
Rather than in silence shrink  
From the truth they needs must think;  
They are slaves who dare not be  
In the right with two or three.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, when his friend Briggs asked him for contributions to the newly launched Broadway Journal, Lowell sent him the first of a series of imaginative letters he intended to write on the annexation of Texas, the principal topic of political discussion during the winter of 1844-1845. The letter never saw the light, for Briggs feared that Lowell's invective was too bitter. Briggs's letter of refusal, couched though it was in shrewd, kind language, marked the end of Lowell's interest in the Broadway Journal, though he did contribute a few poems and critical essays to it.<sup>11</sup>

His association with the Pennsylvania Freeman was more fortunate. Immediately after his marriage to Maria White in December, 1844, the young couple went to Philadelphia, arriving there on New Year's Day, 1845. On January 16 Lowell wrote to his friend C. F. Briggs: "The antislavery Friends pay me \$5 for a leader to their paper which comes out once a fortnight, making \$10

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<sup>10</sup> James Russell Lowell, The Writings of James Russell Lowell, Riverside edition, Boston, 1890, VII, 147.

<sup>11</sup> Scudder, Lowell, I, 159-160.

per month while I am here."<sup>12</sup> Five of the articles he wrote for this journal are extant. The first, entitled "A Word in Season," appeared on the day Lowell wrote his note to Briggs. It is significant because of its enunciation of broad principles. In it he declared: "The aim of the true abolitionist is not only to put an end to negro slavery in America; he is equally the sworn foe of tyranny throughout the world."<sup>13</sup> The other papers dealt with specific problems of the day: the annexation of Texas and its effect on slavery, the inconsistency of people who are prejudiced against the Negro because of his color, and the attitude of American Protestant churches toward slavery.<sup>14</sup>

That same year he contributed three vehement anti-slavery poems to the Boston Courier. The debate on the annexation of Texas was raging, and Lowell gave vent to his feelings in "Anti-Texas," published under the title "Another Rallying Cry by a Yankee." In it he protested in the name of Massachusetts:

And though all other deeds of thine, dear Fatherland, should be  
Washed out, like writing upon sand, by Time's encroaching sea,  
That single word shall stand sublime, nor perish with the rest,  
'Though the whole world sanction slavery, in God's name  
WE protest!<sup>15</sup>

The last stanza of the poem sounds the note of state independence, which was to appear again in the Biglow Papers:

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12 Letters, I, 84.

13 The Anti-Slavery Papers of James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1902, I, 6.

14 See Appendix I for an annotated list of these papers.

15 Quoted in Scudder, Lowell, I, 168.

No, if the old Bay State were sunk, and, as in days of yore,  
 One single ship within her sides the hope of Freedom bore,  
 Run up again the pine tree flag, and on the chainless sea  
 That flag should mark, where'er it waved, the island of the  
 free!<sup>16</sup>

Six months later he "blew another 'dolorous and jarring blast' in the Courier."<sup>17</sup> This time it was the capture of some fugitive slaves that called forth his cry of shame on those who would keep silence while "law-shielded ruffians" slay men who are trying to gain their freedom. Allegiance to slaves as human beings, Lowell avers, takes precedence over allegiance to state:

We owe allegiance to the state; but deeper, truer, more  
 To the sympathies that God hath set within our spirit's core;  
 Our country claims our fealty; we grant it so, but then  
 Before Man made us citizens, great Nature made us men.<sup>18</sup>

In December, 1845, "Verses Suggested by the Present Crisis" appeared. It is the Puritan moralist who is here pleading the cause of abolitionism and urging all men to gather round Truth and fight for the right:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,  
 In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;  
 Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom  
 or blight,  
 Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,  
 And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.<sup>19</sup>

The matter is not a trivial one, he declares, for "[t]hey enslave their

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16 Ibid.

17 Lowell, Letters, I, 92.

18 "On the Capture of Fugitive Slaves Near Washington," Writings, VII, 223.

19 Ibid., 180. In this edition the poem appears under the title "The Present Crisis," 178-184.

children's children who make compromise with sin."<sup>20</sup>

The majority of Lowell's anti-slavery work, however, appeared in the Anti-Slavery Standard. His association with this journal is the subject of several long letters to Sydney Gay, then editor of the abolitionist magazine. The first of these throws light on the man as writer and poet, and therefore deserves special consideration. On June 16, 1846, he tells Gay that he believes himself totally unfitted for contributing to the Standard, but that he is willing, even desirous, that his name should appear, lest he be indebted to abolitionism for some little popularity without incurring the odium attached to a complete identification with the abolitionists. As to his popularity, he believes the abolitionists have overrated it, for "the reputation of a poet who has a high idea of his vocation, is resolved to be true to that vocation, and hates humbug, must be small in his generation." If he is to serve the cause of abolitionism, his true place is to serve it as a poet, since his vocation is the making of verse, not the writing of prose. Finally, he fears that making an agreement to write for a weekly newspaper will be detrimental to his art, for he has always been "a very Quaker in following the Light and writing only when the spirit moved." Yet he promises Gay that he will contribute as much as he can to the paper.<sup>21</sup>

Between July 2, 1846, and November 14, 1850, Lowell contributed some fifty prose articles and a number of poems to the Standard. Besides, several

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>21</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are from Letters, I, 112-113, 114, 114-115.

numbers of the first series of Biglow Papers appeared in it. The prose contributions deal with such apparently divergent topics as compromise, mobs, Daniel Webster, emancipation, the Irish rebellion, and the French Revolution of 1848; yet they are all a direct or an indirect attack on slavery.<sup>22</sup> In the Biglow Papers the fundamental ideas of these prose articles are translated into the homely language of Hosea Biglow and the learned terminology of Parson Wilbur.

Lowell's tribute to Garrison, originally called "The Day of Small Things," but later entitled "To W. L. Garrison," appeared in the Standard on October 19, 1848. In it he lauds the humble beginnings of abolitionism:

In a small chamber, friendless and unseen,  
Toiled o'er his types one poor, unlearned young man;  
The place was dark, unfurnished, and mean;  
Yet there the freedom of a race began.<sup>23</sup>

The following month he contributed an allegorical poem, "The Sower," weighted with the vision of the Civil War. The sower, who has sown the seeds of discord and anarchy in Europe and who has left in his wake naught but the clash of steel burning towns, and pavements curdling with blood, sings:

I sow again the holy Past,  
The happy days when I was young.

Then all was wheat without a tare,  
Then all was righteous, fair, and true;  
And I am he whose thoughtful care  
Shall plant the Old World in the New.

The fruitful germs I scatter free,  
With busy hand, while all men sleep;  
In Europe now, from sea to sea,

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22 See Appendix I for an annotated list of these articles.

23 Writings, VII, 282.

The nations bless me as they reap.<sup>24</sup>

And the poet's cries fall on the unheeding ears of the sower of tares.

Before making an agreement with the Standard, Lowell had pointed out to Sydney Gay, the editor, his unfitness for the work. As time went on, he found it more and more difficult to comply with the wishes of the Executive Committee of the Standard, and on May 21, 1849, he voiced his difficulty again. He believed that some of the abolitionists, evidently members of the Executive Committee, were too radical in their views, and he explained his own position in no uncertain terms:

You know that I never agreed to the Dissolution-of-the-Union movement, and simply because I think it a waste of strength. Why do we not separate ourselves from the African whom we wish to elevate? from the drunkard? from the ignorant? At this minute the song of the bobolink comes rippling through my open window and preaches peace. Two months ago the same missionary was in his South Carolina pulpit, and can I think that he chose another text or delivered another sermon there? Hath not a slaveholder hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter as an abolitionist is? If you prick them do they not bleed? If you tickle them do they not laugh? If you poison them do they not die? If you wrong them shall they not revenge? Nay, I will go a step farther, and ask if all this do not apply to parsons also? Even they are human.<sup>25</sup>

He told Gay plainly that he would not regret severing connections with the Standard, but that he would be willing to continue writing an article every fortnight if the Executive Committee so wished. The Committee did so wish, for Lowell continued to make contributions until November, 1850.

After 1850 Lowell's political writings, except for the second series

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>25</sup> Letters, I, 158.

of Biglow Papers, were negligible. His wife's failing health and her death in 1853 seem to have been major influences in his relinquishing anti-slavery work. Between 1858 and 1866 he contributed a number of articles on secession, emancipation, and reconstruction to the Atlantic Monthly and the North American Review. From 1850 to his death in 1891, however, Lowell was primarily the professor and lecturer, and later on, United States minister to Spain and England.

Roughly speaking, Lowell's interest in politics covered the period between his twenty-first and his forty-sixth year. Apparently, therefore, he brought to it the enthusiasm of youth and the vigor and maturity of middle age. His fame as a political satirist, however, rests on the Biglow Papers, the first series of which was called forth by the Mexican War, the second by the Civil War. Actually, the writing of these papers occupied less than a decade of his long and varied career.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE BIGLOW PAPERS: A GENERAL SURVEY

Lowell first conceived the Biglow Papers as individual articles, loosely bound together by a common subject and by the characters through whom he voiced his opinions, yet laying no claim to a definite sequence of thought. They were, first and foremost, journalistic pieces, and as such they illumined now one, now another, facet of the critical issue of Lowell's day, slavery. Influenced by the popularity of the individual papers, he determined, when only half of the first series had been written, to publish them in book form.<sup>1</sup> In 1866, after he had completed the second series, he published these articles too in the permanent form of a book. It is in this form that the Biglow Papers have maintained their place in American literature; consequently the present study is based, not upon the individual articles as they appeared in the Boston Courier, the Anti-Slavery Standard, and the Atlantic Monthly, but upon the definitive edition of the collected papers.

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1 On December 31, 1847, he wrote to his friend Charles F. Briggs: "I am going to indulge all my fun in a volume of H. Biglow's verses which I am preparing, and which I shall edit under the character of the Rev. Mr. Wilbur. I hope you saw Mr. B.'s last production, which I consider his best hitherto. I am going to include in the volume an essay of the reverend gentleman on the Yankee dialect, and on dialects in general, . . ." -- The Letters of James Russell Lowell, edited by Charles Eliot Norton, New York, 1893, I, 121. Evidently Lowell is here referring to the fourth paper of the first series, which had appeared in the Boston Courier on December 28, 1847.



Why, it may be asked, did Lowell choose this particular form of political satire? The answer is not far to seek. Lowell himself had declared that one of the things the public asks of the poet is that he "express for it its own feeling."<sup>2</sup> By choosing definite characters as his mouthpiece and by employing the Yankee dialect, he was not only expressing the feelings of many New Englanders, but doing so in their own everyday speech. He had employed satire on occasion in his prose articles; the Yankee character which he now assumed allowed him to indulge his rapierlike wit to the full. The result was a series of poems that made the native New Englander chuckle. But Lowell's purpose was by no means a humorous one. If, to use his own words, he "put on the cap and bells" and made himself "one of the court-fools of King Demos, it was less to make his majesty laugh than to win a passage to his royal ears for certain serious things" which he had deeply at heart.<sup>3</sup>

Slavery was to Lowell's mind the great social sin of his day, and the Mexican War "a national crime committed in behoof of Slavery."<sup>4</sup> Many other people thought as Lowell did, and wishing to express their feelings and his own in a telling manner, he conceived the notion of making his mouthpiece an up-country man such as he had often seen at anti-slavery gatherings, "capable of district-school English, but always instinctively falling back into the natural stronghold of his homely dialect when heated to the point of self-forgetfulness."

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2 W. C. Brownell, American Prose Masters, New York, 1909, 274.

3 James Russell Lowell, The Biglow Papers, 5th edition, Boston, 1891, 203.

4 Ibid., 199-200.

ness."<sup>4</sup> Hosea Biglow of Jaalam, Massachusetts, became the immortal embodiment of the up-country man. In him Lowell gathered up all the paradoxical qualities of the typical Yankee, that hybrid springing from earnest Puritan stock amid the hardships of the New World: mystic practicality, niggardly geniality, expedient fanaticism, cast-iron enthusiasm, sour-faced humor, close-fisted generosity.<sup>5</sup>

When he began to carry out his idea, however, Lowell found that if his work was to be complete he would need a foil for Hosea, someone who should represent "the more cautious element of the New England character and its pedantry, as Mr. Biglow should serve for its homely common-sense vivified and heated by conscience."<sup>6</sup> To this end he created the Reverend Homer Wilbur, the kindly, pedantic old man whose long introductions and concluding remarks illumine Hosea's poems even while they tax the patience of the reader. According to Van Wyck Brooks, the original of the Parson was the Reverend Barzillae Frost, the rustic Harvard scholar of Concord, with whom Lowell had spent his period of rustication during his period of rustication as a senior at Harvard.<sup>7</sup> The con-

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4 Ibid., 200. It is interesting to note that the pamphlet on the searching of the Chesapeake by the British, written in 1807 by John Lowell the Rebel, purported to have been written by a Yankee farmer. Ferris Greenslet remarks that Jefferson, against whom the pamphlet was directed, represented "the ideals and interests of the agricultural South against the designs of the commercial North." — The Lowells and Their Seven Worlds, Boston, 1946, 139. In choosing the character of Hosea, James Russell Lowell seems to have been following in the footsteps of the Lowell clan.

5 Lowell, Biglow Papers, 33-34.

6 Ibid., 200.

7 The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865, New York, 1936, 313-314.

trast between the Parson and Hosea has been the subject of comment on the part of critics. Barrett Wendell writes:

At first glance the laborious humour of Parson Wilbur's pedantry, and the formally interminable phases in which he imbeds it, seem radically different from the lines on which they comment. As you ponder them, however, Wilbur's elaborately over-studied prose and the dialect verse of Hosea Biglow . . . fall into the same category. Both prove so forcefully deliberate, both so much matters of detail, that in the end your impression may well be, that, taken all in all, each paper is tediously ingenious.<sup>8</sup>

Ferris Greenslet, on the other hand, holds that Hosea and the Parson

dramatize the two chief sides of Lowell himself even more perfectly than they do two major strains in the New England character. Lowell never outgrew the vernacular wit and wisdom of Hosea, any more than he ever ceased to partake of that old-world lore of Parson Wilbur, which is bodied forth in such full-cadenced prose.<sup>9</sup>

In the introduction to the first series of Biglow Papers, Parson Wilbur provides Lowell with an opportunity for satire entirely independent of the subject matter of the Papers. The notices of the press that were usually appended to second editions of books must have been an eyesore for Lowell, since it was not the genuine worth of a book, but rather the servility of its author or the patronage of its publisher, that evoked them. Consequently he makes the Parson, who is the alleged editor of the Papers, ingenuously announce that motives of economy and of the desire for publicity have induced him to prepare a number of such notices himself and to prefix them to the first edition of

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8 A Literary History of America, New York, 1900, 401.

9 James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1905, 84.

Hosea's book. The seven pages of "notices of the press"<sup>10</sup> that followed are, from a literary point of view, some of the most serious-comic pages of the book illustrating as they do both the ridiculous fraudulency of such notices and the gullibility of the public who are guided by them.

Lowell had not proceeded very far in his undertaking when he perceived the need of a third character, the clown of his puppet-show, since he believed that "true humor is never divorced from moral conviction."<sup>11</sup> In Birdofredum Sawin he intended to embody the half-conscious unmorality of gross natures recoiling "from a puritanism that still strove to keep in its creed the intense savor which had long gone out of its faith and life."<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, Birdofredum's unmorality was to develop into full-fledged rascality before Lowell had done with him.

Such were the three characters whom Lowell made his composite mouth-piece in order to express the popular feeling and opinion of the time. If he had carefully planned the role of each of his characters, he had no less carefully thought out their manner of expression. Parson Wilbur would, of course, use a distinctly learned vocabulary, and his ornate style would give him an opportunity to exhibit his fondness for scraps of Latin and Greek. But Hosea, the central character, would employ the Yankee dialect for his own thoughts as well as for his translations of Birdoffedum's ideas, and this because Lowell esteemed it for its simplicity, its vigor, its imaginative intensity and

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10 Cf. Biglow Papers, 44-54.

11 Ibid., 201.

12 Ibid.,

picturesqueness, its originality, its closeness to Shakespearean and Jacobean English, and, above all, its distinctly national character.

He had long deplored the studied want of simplicity in American writing and speaking, which would eventually look on the mother-tongue as a language to be learned from grammars and dictionaries. The only way to escape from such an unfortunate state was, he believed, to seek the mother-tongue at its living sources, among the "divinely illiterate" people of the New England country-side.<sup>13</sup> Here he found that vigor of expression which alone could produce a sound and lusty book. For when language fades into mere diction, when it is too strictly limited by conventions, it brings forth "a potted literature -- Chinese dwarfs instead of healthy trees."<sup>14</sup>

What foreign critics condemned as exaggeration in the American character and in the Yankee dialect was to Lowell "intensity and picturesqueness, symptoms of the imaginative faculty in full health and strength, though producing, as yet, only the raw and formless material in which poetry is to work."<sup>15</sup> This was to him true originality -- the quality "of being natural, of being naif, which means nothing more than native, of belonging to the age and country in which you are born."<sup>16</sup> This it was that made the Yankee a new phenomenon, a person who scorned the pseudo-classicism of mere imitators of the past and who expressed himself in a language that was distinctly his own.

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I 13 Ibid., 203-204.

14 Ibid., 206.

15 Ibid., 212.

16 Ibid., 272.

Nevertheless the Yankee dialect was closer to Shakespearean and Jacobean English than nineteenth-century English was. The majority of the words and phrases that in Lowell's day were considered peculiar to New England had actually been brought by the early colonists from their mother country and had been in common use at the time the King James translation of the Bible was made. Consequently the true Yankee stood less in need of a Shakespearean glossary than the average Englishman of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

What most recommended the Yankee dialect to Lowell, however, was what he considered its distinctly national character. The Yankee himself,

full of expedients, half-master of all trades, inventive in all but the beautiful, full of shifts, not yet capable of comfort, armed at all points against the old enemy, Hunger, longanimous, good at patching, not so careful for what is best as for what will do, with a clasp to his purse and a button to his pocket, not skilled to build against Time, as in old countries, but against sore-pressing Need,<sup>18</sup>

was no less a product of his environment than was his language, which he used instinctively and unconsciously, for it was a part of his growth and personality, and not merely the result of education or inheritance.<sup>19</sup> Its peculiarities were disappearing, however; newspapers were carrying its localisms to every corner of the country, and so making the New England dialect a kind of a national tongue, more uniform than that of any other nation.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Ibid., 36.

18 Ibid., 33.

19 Ibid., 212. Cf. Russell B. Nye, "Lowell and American Speech," Philological Quarterly, XVIII, July, 1939, 249-256.

20 Lowell, Biglow Papers, 36.

That Lowell was expert in his knowledge and use of the Yankee dialect no one will deny who has carefully read the introductions to the two series of Biglow Papers. His scholarly treatment of Yankee pronunciation, spelling, and peculiarity of phrase bears out Van Wyck Brook's contention that "the Yankee tongue was in his blood."<sup>21</sup> He had listened joyously and eagerly to the hired men during his boyhood. In later life his philological instinct and his fondness for tracing the origins of words and phrases had led him to study the Yankee dialect, and when he came to writing the Biglow Papers it was with the ease and naturalness that come from long-standing familiarity.

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21 Flowering of New England, 313.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BIGLOW PAPERS, FIRST SERIES : AN ANALYTIC STUDY

Through the years the fire of indignation against slavery that had been lighted in Lowell's heart became more and more a consuming flame, until, in 1846, it burst its barriers and spent itself during the next two years in the production of the first series of Biglow Papers.

In December, 1845, the Senate passed resolutions admitting Texas into the Union. By a majority of one, the slave-holding South had vanquished the North in the first pitched battle on a national issue since the Missouri Compromise.<sup>1</sup> On May 11 of the following year Congress passed a resolution declaring that a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico, which had severed diplomatic relations with the United States and had ambushed General Taylor's soldiers while they were scouting near the Rio Grande River. Immediately after the declaration of war, President Polk availed himself of the authorization that had been given him to call for 50,000 volunteers. Massachusetts' quota was 777 men. On May 26 Governor Briggs, in compliance with the President's request, ordered the enrollment of the regiment. Whigs and Abolitionists joined in censuring the action of the Governor, since the President's call was not an order but merely a request. The sight of a recruiting officer

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Everett Hale, James Russell Lowell and His Friends, Boston, 1899, 96.



in a Boston street aroused in Lowell "much the sort of wrath which fired the average Boston gentleman in 1773 when he saw a 'lobsterback' loafing in the same street with as little reason."<sup>2</sup> The result was the first of the series of poems purporting to be written by Hosea Biglow, a farmer from Jaalam, Massachusetts.

### No. I

The first of Hosea's compositions appeared in the Boston Courier on June 17, 1846. Hosea's father, Mr. Ezekiel Biglow, introduces his son to the public in a letter to the Honorable Joseph T. Buckingham, editor of the Boston Courier. With typical Yankee wit and homely figures he describes in detail the specific occasion of the poem. On a visit to Boston the previous week, he declares, Hosea had seen "a cruetin Sarjunt a struttin round as popler as a hen with 1 chicking, with 2 fellers a drummin and fifin arter him like all nater."<sup>3</sup> Despite the petty officer's superior air Hosea was not impressed; indeed, he "wood n't take none o' his sarse for all he hed much as 20 Rooster's tales stuck onto his hat and eenamost enuf brass a bobbin up and down on his shoulders . . . to make a six pounder out on." The sight inspired him to write a poem, for that night his father "heern Him a thrashin round like a short-tailed Bull in fli-time." Next morning Hosea carried his verses to Parson Wilbur for approval, and the latter forthwith took upon himself not only the office of monitor but also that of commentator. Ezekiel Biglow ends his letter on a note

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2 Ibid., 168.

3 The quotations given in this section are from James Russell Lowell, The Biglow Papers, 5th edition, Boston, 1891, 62, 63, 64-70.

that is characteristic of the small-town man who is anxious to gain some publicity: "If you print 'em [Hosea's verses]," the father pleads, "I wish you'd jest let folks know who hosy's father is, . . ."

Hosea's poem is an example of downright honesty and frankness. Condemnation of the Mexican War and particularly of the Bay State for acquiescing in that war by recruiting a regiment -- this is the theme that runs through the twenty eight-line stanzas in trochaic tetrameter. The righteous indignation of the poet admits of no pause in the development of his theme, as he uses all the resources of Yankee Puritanism, wit, and clear-sightedness to drive home his point.

The recruiting sergeant merely provides Hosea with a contemptible point of departure, for

'T aint a knowin' kind o' cattle  
Thet is ketched with mouldy corn.

In stanzas three and four he approaches his theme as he rails about the greed of the South and the servility of the North. Though Hosea himself resents "the overreachin' O' them ingger-drivin' States," the slave-traders, sided by Yankee renegades, have subjugated the North to such a degree that

We begin to think it 's nater  
To take sarse an' not be riled; --

and Hosea elucidates his statement with one of his apt figures:

Who'd expect to see a tater  
All on eend at bein' biled?

And now he has come to his real subject -- war, war in general, and the war against Mexico in particular. For him war is neither more nor less than murder. God has made that point clear in Scriptures; there is no way of dodging

the issue: "you 've gut to git up airly Ef you want to take in God." Furthermore, ultimately was is a matter of personal, not of national, responsibility. Free men cannot waive that responsibility by blindly following their leaders:

Ef you take a sword an' dror it,  
 An' go stick a feller thru,  
 Guv'ment aint to answer for it,  
 God 'll send the bill to you.

There is a curious contradiction between going to church and "cuttin' folks's throats." As for the present war, despite all men's talk about freedom, it is a purely imperialistic war, waged for the benefit of the slave-holding South.

In view of that fact

Aint it cute to see a Yankee  
 Take sech everlastin' pains  
 All to git the Devil's thankee,  
 Helpin' on 'em weld their chains?  
 Wy, it 's jest ez clear ez figgers,  
 Clear ez one an' one make two,  
 Chaps that make black slaves o' niggers  
 Want to make wite slaves o' you.

Hosea has done a good deal of thinking on this subject, and he has reached some definite conclusions: Every inhuman act injures the entire human race. War will not right matters, nor will contempt of black people. The advocates of slavery have no regard for color; they are concerned with one thing only -- their own purse:

Slavery aint o' nary color,  
 'Taint the hide thet makes it wus,  
 Allit keers fer in a feller  
 "S jest to make him fill its pus.

Again Hosea turns the contemptuous gaze of a "kal'ulating" Yankee on the recruiting sergeant and bids him:

Jest go home an' ask our Nancy  
 Wether I 'd be sech a goose

Ez to jine ye, -- guess you 'd fancy  
 The eternal bung wuz loose!  
 She wants me fer home consumption,  
 Let alone the hay 's to mow, --  
 Ef you 're arter folks o' gumption,  
 You 've a darned long row to hoe.

The Northern editors who have been talking so much about the war would, Hosea thinks, make fine recruits. Certainly these editors "thet 's crowin' Like a cockerel three months old," would be fit companions for the sergeant and his two attendants. But "Like a peach thet 's got the yellers," they will probably sprout before they think of going to war. One more sarcastic fling, and Hosea has done with the sergeant:

Wal, go 'long to help 'em stealin'  
 Bigger pens to cram with slaves.

From this point on to the end of the poem, he is lifted above the petty personal annoyance of the moment to the abiding national issues that are at stake. The dignity that manifests itself in the reproachful lines

Help the strong to grind the feeble,  
 Help the many agin the few,

becomes majestic as he mourns the defection of Massachusetts. Shame mingles with his innate sense of the high destiny of his state as he almost whippers:

Massachusetts, God forgive her,  
 She 's akneelin' with the rest,  
 She, thet ough' to ha' clung fer ever  
 In her grand old eagle-nest;  
 She thet ough' to stand so fearless  
 While the wracks are round her hurled,  
 Holdin' up a beacon peerless  
 To the oppressed of all the world!

And now righteous indignation again wells up in his breast as he recalls the fate of the envoys Massachusetts had sent to Charleston and New Orleans in behalf of free colored seamen who had been imprisoned and even sold into slavery.

If the expulsion of Mr. Hoar from South Carolina and of Mr. Hubbard from Louisiana does not bring Massachusetts to her senses,

Wut 'll make ye act like freemen?

Wut 'll git your dander riz?

Let Massachusetts hark back to "the days o' seventy-six," when men knew their duty and did it; let her deliver this ultimatum to the South:

I'll return ye good fe evil  
 Much ez we frail mortils can,  
 But I wun 't go help the Devil  
 Makin' man the cus o' man;  
 Call me coward, call me traiter,  
 Jest ez suits your mean idees, --  
 Here I stand a tyrant-hater,  
 An' the friend o' God an' Peace!

The mood of lofty idealism passes, and in the last stanza of the poem it is merely Hosea, the shrewd New Englander, that speaks:

Ef I 'd my way I hed ruther  
 We should go to work an' part,  
 They take one way, we take t'other,  
 Guess it would n't break my heart;  
 Man hed ough' to put asunder  
 Them thet God has noways jined,  
 An' I should n't gretly wonder  
 Ef there 's thousands o' my mind.

With this suggestion of dissolving the Union, Hosea abruptly ends his first poem.

In a comparatively brief note Parson Wilbur introduces himself to the reader. He associates recruiting sergeants with Satan, denounces war as incompatible with Christianity, and concludes by pointedly asking whether the mortality of the so-called gentleman is different from that of the ordinary man.

## No. II

On August 18, 1847, more than a year after Hosea's first poem had

been published, the Boston Courier carried a "Letter from a Volunteer in Salt-  
 10," later entitled "A Letter from Mr. Hosea Biglow to the Hon. J. T. Buckingham  
 Editor of the Boston Courier, Covering a Letter from Mr. B. Sawin, Private in  
 the Massachusetts Regiment." In this number the two subordinate characters,  
 Parson Wilbur and Birdofredum Sawin, make their appearance. The former, it is  
 true, has already introduced himself by his comment at the end of the first num-  
 ber, but here he reveals his entire personality.

Parson Wilbur has but two statements to make in his prefatory note:  
 that it was Hosea who translated Birdofredum's letter into verse, and that  
 Birdofredum is not a member of his congregation. Yet even in this note, the  
 whole man is revealed: his long-windedness, his pedantry, his self-complacency,  
 his hatred of war.

Hosea introduces Birdofredum's remarks in a brief letter to "Mister  
 Buckinum." Again his homely expression, unique spelling, and incongruous refer-  
 ence to his own occupation bring a twinkle to the reader's eye. Particularly  
 delightful is his unconscious pun on cocktails. Writing of Birdofredum, he says  
 "I never heerd nothin bad on him let Alone his havin what Parson Wilbur cals a  
pongshong for cocktails, and he ses it wuz a soshiashun of ideas sot him agoin  
 arter the Cruotin Sargient cos he wore a cocktail onto his hat."<sup>4</sup>

Disillusionment is the keynote of Birdofredum's letter. The good  
 times of October training days have yielded to the hardships and discipline of  
 actual warfare. To him, as to Hosea, "killin' folks" is murder:

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4 The quotations in this section are from Ibid., 73-81, 85, 86.

There 's sutthin' gits into my throat thet makes it hard to swaller,  
 It comes so nateral to think about a hempen collar;  
 It 's glory, -- but, in spite o' all my tryin' to git callous,  
 I feel a kind o' in a cart, aridin' to the gallus.

Still more uncomfortable is his reaction to the sentinel's "baggonet," when he finds that he cannot come and go as he pleases:

An' so ez I wuz goin' by, not thinkin' wut would folly,  
 The everlastin' cus he stuck his one-pronged pitchfork in me  
 An' made a hole right thru my close ez ef I wuz an in'my.

How different is the Mexico Birdofredum has found out from the one eulogized in Faneuil Hall in January, 1847. Then it seemed

. . . a dreffle kind o' privilege  
 Atrampin' round thru Boston streets among the gutter's drivelage;  
 An' every feller felt ez though all Mexico was hisn.

But Saltillo is "about the meanest place a skunk could wal diskiver." The food is so poor that Birdofredum would "give a year's pay fer a smell o' one good bluenose tater;" and the insects -- with typical Yankee exaggeration Birdofredum tells of them:

One night I started up on eend an' thought I wuz to hum agin,  
 I heern a horn, thinks I it 's Sol the fisherman hez come agin,  
 His bellowses is sound enough -- ez I 'm a livin' creater,  
 I felt a thing go thru my leg, -- 't wuz nothin more'n a skeeter!

His attitude toward the Mexican people has also changed. Before he left home he was almost convinced that Mexicans were

A sort o' folks a chap could kill an' never dream on 't arter,  
 No more'n a feller 'd dream o' pigs thet he hed hed to slarter;

now, however, they seem very much like other human beings, and Birdofredum has begun to wonder about the ethics of driving them out of their dominion. But he casts his scruples to the winds, for Caleb Cushing, the colonel in charge of his regiment, has laid down the principle of this war:

Thet our nation 's bigger 'N theirn an' so its rights air bigger,  
An' thet it 's all to make 'em free thet we air pullin' trigger.

One thing has become clear to him: when these Anglo-Saxons rant about every  
man's doing as he pleases "'every man' don't mean a nigger or a Mexican."

The letter ends, as it began, on a strong note of disillusionment.  
Birdofredum's "Anglosaxon ossifers" no longer show him the consideration he ex-  
perienced in Boston, and as a result the enthusiastic volunteer of a year ago  
has become the disgruntled private who has lost most of his respect and authority.

In a four-and-a-half page note Parson Wilbur deals with the ethics of  
the Mexican War. Though many people have held that the war is being fought not  
to avenge a national quarrel but to spread free institutions and Protestantism,  
the Parson seriously doubts this explanation. He much fears "that we shall be  
seized now and then with a Protestant fervor, as long as we have neighbor Na-  
boths whose wallowings in Papistical mire excite our horror in exact proportion  
to the size and desirableness of their vineyards." The Parson's final thrust is  
directed against Public Opinion, which thumps the pulpit-cushion, guides the  
editor's pen, and wags the senator's tongue. "It were a great blessing," he  
concludes, "if every particular of what in the sum we call popular sentiment  
could carry about the name of its manufacturer stamped legibly upon it."

### No. III

In the 1847 gubernatorial campaign, the Whigs of Massachusetts renom-  
inated Governor Nixon Briggs. The Democrats chose Caleb Cushing of Mexican War  
fame, who had been raised to the rank of Brigadier-General by President Polk.  
Late in the campaign, rumor had it that John Paul Robinson, hitherto a zealous  
member of the Whig party and a member of the State Legislature several times,



had gone over to the Democratic camp. Questioned by the editor of the Boston Palladium as to the truth of this rumor, Robinson replied in an open letter, declaring his intention to vote for Cushing.<sup>5</sup> The letter provided Lowell with a new theme for Hosea Biglow, and the third of the first series of Biglow Papers appeared in the Boston Courier on November 2, 1847, under the title "What Mr. Robinson Thinks."

Parson Wilbur's introductory note is significant in that it embodies Lowell's conception of the nature and end of satire. Satire, he declares, is intended to have a general, not a personal, application, for it attacks bad principles, not individuals. Nevertheless, since a wrong principle is comparatively harmless in the abstract and begins to work havoc only when it is exemplified in the life and character of a particular person, the satirist is obliged to select for attack an individual who has made himself the exponent of the wrong principle, lest his message vanish into thin air. The aim of the satirist is to be severe upon falsehood,

and, as Truth and Falsehood start from the same point, and sometimes even go along together for a little way, his business is to follow the path of the latter after it diverges, and to show her floundering in the bog at the end of it.<sup>6</sup>

Two dangers confront the satirist: loss of sensibility to the force of language, resulting from his continual use of satire, may make him strike harder than he realizes; and the desire of victory may obscure his vision of Truth. Nevertheless strong words are necessary if great public evils are to be wiped out.

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5 Cf. ibid., Notes, 516.

6 The quotations in this section are from ibid., 88-91, 97, 99.

Hosea's nine-stanza poem in dactylic tetrameter is perhaps the most spirited poem of the first series. No other has so intriguing a refrain; in no other is the satire so persistent. In it Hosea attacks the principle "Our country, right or wrong." His immediate theme is John P. Robinson's defection from the Whig party; his larger theme is again the Mexican War and its effect on the nation.

Though Governor Briggs attends to his duty at home and avoids meddling with other people's business,

. . . John P.  
Robinson he  
Sez he wunt vote fer Guvenor B.

Consequently, people will have to come round to John P. Robinson's way of thinking, "An' go in fer thunder an' guns."

General Cushing, Briggs's opponent, has shown himself a much wiser man. Though he has been on all sides that promised him advancement or profit, he has ever been consistent:

He 's ben true to one party, -- an' thet  
is himself, --  
So John P.  
Robinson he  
Sez he shall vote fer Ginerall C.

Principles means nothing to General Cushing; he favors the Mexican War with its opportunity for glory and plunder:

Wut did God make us raytional creeturs fer,  
But glory an' gunpowder, plunder an' blood?

Now Hosea warms up to his theme as he tells of New England's moral sense, her opposition to the war on the ground that it is not Christian.

But John P.  
Robinson he

Sez this kind o' thing 's an exploded idee.

Robinson insists on the principle "Our country, right or wrong":

The side of our country must ollers be took,  
An' President Polk, you know, he is our country.

Hosea cites the authority of Parson Wilbur against such pernicious sentiments.

The talk about America's destiny is to the Parson, and therefore to his congregation "half on it ign'ance, an' t'other half rum." The Parson never heard of the Apostles' soliciting votes or seeking office to the tune of a drum and a fife. However, since

. . . John P.  
Robinson he  
Sez they did n't know everythin' down in Judee,

Hosea concludes, with his tongue in his cheek:

Wal, it 's a marcy we 've gut folks to tell us  
The rights an' the wrongs o' these matters, I vow;  
God sends country lawyers, an' other wise fellers,  
To start the world's team wen it gits in a slough,  
Fer John P.  
Robinson he  
Sez the world 'll go right, ef he hollers out Gee.

Parson Wilbur adds a nine-page note to Hosea's poem. First he elucidates the error latent in the principle "Our country, right or wrong." In his long-winded manner he points out the double, though undivided, allegiance that men owe: the one to their earthly country, the other and greater to their heavenly fatherland. This latter country is bounded on all sides by Justice, by a sense of duty. When duty points to one path, and earthly love of country to another, though the choice be hard, men "must take silently the hand of Duty and follow her."

As to the notice in the Boston Morning Post of November 3, attributing

Hosea's verses to the pen of one James Russell Lowell, the Parson quotes a letter to the editor of the Boston Courier in which he eloquently defends the cause of his young parishioner. Hosea has never used his pen for worldly gain, the Parson declares; he loves his country dearly and has served her well in his capacity as farmer, better even than General Scott, the hero of the Mexican War; he is opposed to the Whig doctrines of protective policy; and -- the Parson shudders to admit it -- he has become infected with the ideas of the journal called the Liberator, "whose heresies," the Parson asserts, "I take every opportunity of combating, and of which, I thank God, I have never read a single line." The Parson has but one objection to Hosea's verses: the references to himself and his sentiments, which, he admits, he had expressed in a sermon that he would be pleased to submit to the editor of the Courier for insertion in his journal. His Yankee business acumen will not permit the Parson to allow the opportunity of advertising without charge his tutorial services in preparing young men for college; consequently he devotes the last paragraph of his letter as well as its long postscript to an explanation of his services in this line.

A satiric reference to General Scott's fitness for the presidency brings the Parson's note to a close. If the candidate's fitness is to be determined by the number of Mexicans he has killed, Scott's claim is at present the strongest, though some people may think the General "has invalidated his claims by too much attention to the decencies of apparel, and the habits belonging to a gentleman." But the Parson leaves such abstruse points of statesmanship for others to settle. He confesses that he admires even while he deplores the devotion of those heroic officers who expose themselves to the danger of being killed on the training-field by some enthusiast who wished to lend reality to

the sham combats. He regrets that space does not permit him to discuss the question whether Christians may lawfully be soldiers, but leaves his readers with the advice that they consult Jortin on this point.

#### No. IV

The Mexican War and the slavery question had already caused a split in the Whig party when, on December 6, 1847, R.C. Winthrop of Boston, a Whig, was elected Speaker of the House after three ballots. The need for three ballots, of course, was due to the firm opposition of John Gorham Palfrey, a Whig from Boston, and Joshua Giddings, a representative from Ohio. Despite the intensity of public opinion, Palfrey refused to vote for Winthrop because he knew the latter would not use his influence as Speaker to stop the Mexican War and to prevent the extension of slavery into new territory. Many of the so-called "Cotton" Whigs of Boston, men who were interested in their purse rather than in principle, were indignant at Palfrey's stand.<sup>7</sup> Lowell took occasion to express their attitude in the fourth Biglow paper, which appeared in the Boston Courier on December 28, 1847.

The scene is State Street, Boston, and Increase D. O'Phace in haranguing a crowd on Palfrey's position. Hosea, a member of the audience, reports the speech in verse form. Hence the title of the paper, "Remarks of Increase D. O'Phace, Esquire, at an Extrumperry Caucus in State Street, Reported by Mr. H. Biglow."

As usual, Parson Wilbur has an introductory note. This time he cau-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. ibid., Notes, 517-518.

tions the ordinary reader that Hosea, far from reporting an actual speech, is rather making use of a license assumed by historians of putting into the mouths of their characters words that seem fitting to the occasion. Increase O'Phace, therefore, is merely the puppet mouthpiece of the "Cotton" Whigs.

Hosea's theme in this paper is political expediency, but instead of personally attacking this wrong principle, he lets Increase reveal its vileness by his very defense of it.

Indignation has got the better of Increase at the report of Palfrey's "treachery," as he terms it. He seems to see the American eagle making ready to pounce upon Palfrey. "Forgive me, my friends," he pleads,

. . . ef I seem to be het,  
But a crisis like this must with vigor be met;  
Wen an Arnold the star-spangled banner bestains,  
Holl Fourth o' Julys seem to bile in my veins.<sup>8</sup>

To the objection that people knew Palfrey's principles before they elected him, Increase replies:

Wut wuz ther in them from this vote to prevent him?  
A marcifful Providunce fashioned us holler  
O' pupose thet we might our principles swaller;  
It can hold any quantity of 'em, the belly can,  
An' bring 'em up ready for use like the pelican,  
Or more like the kangaroo, who (wich is stranger)  
Puts her family into her pouch wen there 's danger.

Principles, this vulgar demagogue believes, should be kept as a private possession and not exposed to the view of the others. Besides, he says, latitude — is he thinking of the North and the South here? — has a wonderful power for shifting man's moral attitude. He agrees with the philosophers who hold

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<sup>8</sup> The quotations in this section are from ibid., 103-105, 107-110, 115-118.

Thet a change o' demand makes a change o' condition,  
An' thet everythin' 's nothin' except by position;

consequently, when a man is elected to Congress, he must not be himself, but  
must adapt himself to conditions,

Fer a coat thet sets wal in ole Massachusetts,  
Wen it gits on to Washinton, somehow askew sets,

As for the resolutions passed at the convention in Springfield, Massachusetts, on September 29, 1847, is there anyone in his audience so stupid as to think such resolutions mean anything? What is a political convention anyway? Some delegates get together, argue a while, make speeches which they fear will spoil if they are not given; then comes a series of high-sounding resolves, accompanied by references to their patriotic forebears. The gullible public, beguiled by their talk about ending the war and the spread of slavery,

. . . march in precessions, an' git up hooraws,  
An' tramp thru the mud fer the good o' the cause,  
An' think they 're a kind o' fulfillin' the prophecies,  
Wen they 're on 'y jest changin' the holders of offices!  
Ware A sot afore, B is comfortable seated,  
One humbug 's victor'ous an' t'other defeated.  
Each honnable doughface gits jest wut he axes,  
An' the people — their annoal soft sodder an' taxes.

Opposition to wrong in the abstract, says Increase, is to be commended,

but to attack an actual wrong is merely to invite criticism and failure:

I'm willin' a man should go tollable strong  
Agin wrong in the abstract, fer thet kind o' wrong  
Is ollers unpop'lar an' never gits pitied,  
Because it 's a crime no one ever committed;  
But he mus' n't be hard on partickler sins,  
Coz then he 'll be kickin' the people's own shins.

The Democrats have won all their successes "simply by stickin' together like fun." Though they have "sucked us" into the Mexican War, have contracted a million-dollar debt, and acted for a high tariff while talking against it,

To the people they 're ollers ez slick ez molasses,  
 An' butter their bread on both sides with The Masses,  
 Half o' whom they 've persuaded, by way of a joke,  
 Thet Washington's mantelpiece fell upon Polk.

All of these blessings could be the lot of the Whigs, if some representative  
 with a conscience would keep his scruples to himself and not rant about being  
 loyal to his constituents,

Wen every fool knows thet a man represents  
 Not the fellers thet sent him, but them on the fence, --  
 . . . . .  
 Constitoounts air hendy to help a man in,  
 But arterwards don't weigh the heft of a pin.

New England had a chance at the Speakership; Palfrey tried to spoil  
 that chance. New England was well on the way to political and economic success.  
 She was condemning the war, and yet kept it going. Her position was such that,  
 no matter which side won, she could step in and share the plunder, for no one  
 could tell what she really stood for. But men like Palfrey, who have backbone,  
 have bolted through the door of success. Everyone knew that Palfrey was a peace  
 man, but he must not think he can act as a policeman if Uncle Sam starts a riot.  
 As for the war, even if it is not well pleasing to God, it won us foreign recog-  
 nition. Russia and France realize that we are no longer a nation to be trifled  
 with.

As this point Increase pauses in his eulogy of political expediency  
 to vent his wrath upon a bystander whose shouts have interrupted him several  
 times. Finding that this up-country fellow is Biglow, he denounces him as a  
 traitor, a blasphemer, and worst of all, a maker of bad verses. Society will  
 not be safe so long as monsters like Biglow are alive:

Wy, he goes agin war, agin indirect taxes,  
 Agin sellin' wild lands 'cept to settlers with axes,



Agin holdin' o' slaves, though he knows it 's the corner  
Our libbaty rests on, the mis'able scorner!

More than that: "He writes fer thet ruther unsafe print, the Courier," and so rather than listen to a word from him, Increase O'Phace bids his audience good morning.

Parson Wilbur adds a comparatively short note to Hosea's fourth poem. Like his other comments, it is rich in religious and classical allusions, but its satire is more sparkling, though not less keen. This time he attacks the pernicious habit of speech-making in Congress. "The two faculties of speech and of speech-making," he declares, "are wholly diverse in their natures. By the first we make ourselves intelligible, by the last unintelligible, to our fellows." And a little later:

In reading Congressional debates, I have fancied that, after the subsidence of those painful buzzings in the brain which result from such exercises, I detected a slender residuum of valuable information. I made the discovery that nothing takes longer in the saying than anything else, for, as ex nihilo nihil fit, so from one polypus nothing any number of similar ones may be produced.

He concludes with a caustic reference to "certain bipeds, afflicted with ditch-water on the brain, who take occasion to tap themselves in Faneuil Halls, meeting-houses, and other places of public resort."

#### No. V

In April, 1848, a Captain Drayton and his mate, Sayres, attempted to assist some seventy slaves in escaping from Washington. Speedily recaptured, the fugitives were sold South, while Drayton and Sayres, after barely escaping with their lives, were imprisoned. On April 29 Senator Hale of New Hampshire introduced a resolution implying sympathy for the oppressed. Immediately he

became the object of the most abusive language on the part of the Southern senators, who were led by John Calhoun of South Carolina.

The affair itself and the debate in the Senate on Hale's resolution fired Lowell with righteous indignation, to which he gave vent in the Boston Courier of May 3, 1848, through the medium of Hosea Biglow. The title of this fifth Biglow paper is "The Debate in the Sennit. Sot to a Nussry Rhyme."

Even the pedantic disguise of Parson Wilbur falls away and reveals Lowell himself as the actual writer of the introductory note. It is Lowell the lover of freedom, the enemy of oppression, the keen journalist, who explains the occasion of Hosea's satire and relegates to a bygone era John C. Calhoun, the Sir Kay of modern Chivalry. Like the little boy who scowls and stamps and threatens to go to bed without supper, so Calhoun threatens dissolution of the Union whenever the question of slavery is touched. The little boy is wise enough, however, to eat his porridge cold and to gulp down his dignity before bedtime; Calhoun lets "slip his pack-thread cable with a crooked pin at the end of it to anchor South Carolina upon the very bank and shoal of the Past."<sup>9</sup>

Hosea himself introduces his poem with a brief note to the editor of the Boston Courier, which deserves to be quoted in full:

Mr. Editor, As i wuz kinder prunin round, in a little nussry sot  
out a year or 2 a go, the Dbait in the sennit cum inter my mine An so  
i took & Sot it to wut I call a nussry rime. I hev made sum onnable  
Gentlemun speak thut dident speak in a Kind uv Poetikul lie sense the  
seeson is dreffle backerd up This way

ewers as ushul

Hosea Biglow

John C. Calhoun is the leader of the twelve-stanza debate. He might be called the interlocutor of Hosea's show, with other senators providing a kind of sole refrain. The entire poem has its prose counterpart in "An Imaginary

Conversation," published in the Anti-Slavery Standard on May 25, 1848, three weeks after the appearance of Hosea's poem in the Boston Courier.<sup>10</sup>

Calhoun begins with his usual appeal to the authority of the Constitution, but Hosea turns his righteous boast into a fine bit of satire:

"Here we stan' on the Constitution, by thunder!  
 It 's a fact o' which ther 's bushils o' proofs;  
 Fer how could we trample on 't so, I wonder,  
 Ef 't wor n't thet it 's ollers under our hoofs?"  
 Sez John C. Calhoun, sez he;  
 "Human rights haint no more  
 Right to come on this floor,  
 No more 'n the man in the moon," sez he.

There follows that swift interchange of ideas between Calhoun and his confreres which gives Hosea an opportunity to blast every one of Calhoun's standard arguments.

"The North haint no kind o' bisness with nothin," declares Calhoun; and Senator Foote of Mississippi, one of Hale's bitterest opponents, confirms his opinion:

"I should like to shoot  
 The holl gang, by the great horn spoon." sez he.

Slavery is the keystone of freedom, and Northern slaves are the South's greatest source of profit, Calhoun avers in his next speech; Mangum, a former senator from North Carolina, disagrees with him:<sup>11</sup>

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The quotations in this section are from ibid., 121-128

10 See Appendix I for a summary of the prose article.

11 Evidently Lowell was nodding when he introduced Mangum into the debate, for Mangum was a senator from 1831 to 1837 and from 1841 to 1847.

"Fer all thet," sez Mangum,  
 "'T would be better to hang 'em,  
 An' so git red on 'em soon," sez he.

The haughty Southern aristocrat in Calhoun, accustomed to take his  
 ease while others slave for him, brings forth the next argument:

"The mass ough' to labor an' we lay on soffies,  
 Thet 's the reason I want to spread Freedom's aree;  
 It puts all the cunniness on us in office,  
 An' reelises our Maker's orig'nal idee."

Cass of Michigan, who had sold himself to the South, echoes Calhoun's sentiments

"Thet 's ez plain," sez Cass,  
 "Ez thet some one 's an ass,  
 It 's ez clear ez the sun is at noon," sez he.

Calhoun is not a friend of oppression; indeed, he has always striven  
 to make free with Northern rights. No wonder Jefferson Davis of Mississippi,  
 the future president of the Confederacy, agrees that "the perfection o' bliss  
 is in skinnin' thet same old coon," for could anything please a Southerner more  
 than to gain an advantage over the North?

The Southerners, however, must not be allowed to make all the points  
 in Hosea's debate. In the next stanza, therefore, he lets Calhoun turn the  
 tables upon himself:

"Slavery 's a thing thet depends on complexion,  
 It 's God 's law thet fetters on black skins don't chafe;  
 Ef brains wuz to settle it (horrible reflection!)  
 Wich of our onnable body 'd be safe?"

Senator Hannegan of Indiana quickly seizes the opportunity for a fine thrust:

"'Thet exception is quite oppertoon," sez he."

Calhoun now turns to Cass, the tool of slaveholders, and assures him:

"At the North we don't make no distinction o' color;  
 You can all take a lick at our shoes wen you please,"

to which statement Jarnagin of Tennessee adds, "'They wunt hev to larn agin,  
They all on 'em know the old toon,'"

Once Calhoun has begun his browbeating, he is loath to give it up.

Not satisfied with humiliating Senator Cass, he now indicts Northerners :

" No'thern men, like us patriarchs, don't sell their  
children,  
But they du sell themselves, ef they get a good chance."

Again a Northern senator, Atherton of Massachusetts, interrupts Calhoun, but  
his manner is deprecating:

"This is gittin' severe,  
"I wish I could dive like a loon," sez he.

Now at last Calhoun brings out his scarecrow, dissolution of the  
Union, and Senator Colquitt of Georgia comes in with the refrain:

"Yes, the North," sez Colquitt,  
"Ef we Southerners all quit,  
Would go down like a busted balloon," sez he.

Calhoun next cites the fate of the French aristocracy since the revo-  
lution of 1789; Senator Johnson of Maryland with Puritanic mien confirms  
Calhoun's view:

"Yes," sez Johnson," in France  
They 're beginnin' to dance  
Beelzebub's own rigadoon," sez he.

As for the South, Calhoun points out as he prepares to bring the de-  
bate to a conclusion, it fears nothing; its slaves will welcome the day when  
the South drives the North out of the Union. Precisely because the slaves are  
happy, Southerners resent Northern interference. With a grand flourish Senator  
Lewis of Alabama speaks the final word:

"Ah," sez Dixon H. Lewis,  
"It perfectly true is.

Thet slavery 's airth's grettest boon," sez he.

Parson Wilbur now takes up the thread of the argument and makes a satiric thrust at the South in connection with the Drayton-Sayres affair. He wonders that the Washington jury did not find a true bill against the North Star for aiding Drayton and Sayres, for that "would have been quite af a piece with the intelligence displayed by the South on other questions about slavery."

But the slavery issue is becoming too serious for mere satire, and once again Lowell drops the mask of Parson Wilbur to plead his cause:

In God's name, let all, who hear nearer and nearer the hungry moan of the storm and the growl of the breakers, speak out! But, alas! we have no right to interfere. If a man pluck an apple of mine, he shall be in danger of the justice; but if he steal my brother, I must be silent. Who says this? Our Constitution, consecrated by the callous consuetude of sixty years, and grasped in triumphant argument by the left hand of him whose right hand clutches the clotted slave-whip. Justice, venerable with the undethronable majesty of countless aeons, says, — SPEAK! The past, wise with the sorrows and desolations of ages, from amid her shattered fanes and wolf-housing palaces, echoes, — SPEAK! Nature through her thousand trumpets of freedom, her stars, her sun-rises, her seas, her winds, her cataracts, her mountains blue with cloudy pines, blows jubilant encouragement, and cries, — SPEAK! From the soul's trembling abysses the still, small voice not vaguely murmurs, — SPEAK! But alas! the Constitution and the Honorable Mr. Bagowind, M.C., say, — BE DUMB!

The majestic mood passes as Parson Wilbur inquires almost playfully whether the proponents of slavery will stand among the goats on judgment day. He concludes his remarks with a condemnation of mediocrity and a warning as to the outcome of the struggle between Christ and slaveholders.

#### No. VI

"The Debate in the Sennit" was the last of Hosea's papers to appear in the Boston Courier. The following day, May 4, 1848, he contributed his

first poem to the Anti-Slavery Standard. "The Pious Editor's Creed," as it is entitled, and its successor, "A Letter from a Candidate for the Presidency," are evidently the articles to which Lowell refers in his letter to Sydney Gay, editor of the Standard, on April 27, 1848:

My dear Sydney, -- I send you something [apparently the letter from the presidential candidate] of my friend Hosea, which I have copied rather hastily from his somewhat obscure chirography. There was a note of his accompanying it which I have not time to copy. I will send it to-morrow. . . . You can take your choice between this and the other [ "The Pious Editor's Creed" ]. Both will keep a week, I think. The other's the best, this the most taking. It is not so humorous as some of Hosea's productions, but it is by far the wittiest. . . . I may send some more stanzas when I send Hosea's introductory note.<sup>12</sup>

Of these two poems, Jennette Tandy says:

the Pious Editor's Creed and A Letter from a Candidate for the Presidency are in some sort Lowell's masterpiece of irony. They are less extravagant in tone, less disagreeably jingling in meter than those which preceded them. Each is a close-framed miniature of a type of low politician frequently to be seen in the halls of democracy.<sup>13</sup>

As usual, a note from Parson Wilbur introduces Hosea's poem. This time the note takes the form of an extract from a sermon in which the Parson descants upon the responsibility and power of the journalist, and deplores the low state of American journalism. Like a clergyman mounting the pulpit, the editor daily preaches to a congregation of fifty thousand, all of whom eagerly attend to his words. Unfortunately, however, he takes up the shepherd's crook not that the sheep may be fed, but that he may never want a warm woolen suit and a joint of mutton. . . . He blows up the flames of political discord for no other occasion than that he may thereby

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<sup>12</sup> The Letters of James Russell Lowell, edited by Charles Eliot Norton, New York, 1893, I, 128-129.

<sup>13</sup> Crackerbox Philosophers, New York, 1925, 48.

handily boil his own pot. I believe there are two thousand of these mutton-loving shepherds in the United States, and of these how many have even the dimmest perception of their immense power, and the duties consequent thereon? Here and there, haply, one. Nine hundred and ninety-nine labor to impress upon the people the great principles of Tweedledum, and other nine hundred and ninety-nine preach with equal earnestness the gospel according to Tweedledee.<sup>14</sup>

In Hosea's poem one of these "mutton-loving shepherds" sets forth the thirteen articles of his creed:

1. I believe in Freedom's cause in other countries,

But libbaty 's a kind o' thing  
That don't agree with niggers.

2. I believe in extravagance when I am in office,

Fer I hev loved my country sence  
My eye-teeth filled their sockets,  
An' Uncle Sam I reverence,  
Partic'larly his pockets.

3. I believe in any plan of lebying taxes so long as I get what

I want.

4. I believe in the sending out of foreign missions on certain

conditions:

I mean nine thousand dolls. per ann.,,  
Nine thousan' more fer outfit,  
An' me to recommend a man  
The place 'ould jest about fit.

5. I believe in special ways of praying and making converts:

I mean in preyin' till one busts  
On wut the party chooses,

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<sup>14</sup> The quotations in this section are from Lowell, Biglow Papers, 131-138.



An' in convartin' public trusts  
To very privit uses.

6. I believe in talking money and in making money on the people  
during election time; as for myself,

I don't care how hard money is,  
Ez long ez mine 's paid punctooal.

7. I believe in freedom of the press to the extent of guiding  
public opinions but to the extent of investigating the actions of the govern-  
ment or its officials.

8. I believe in giving Caesar his due; for me that means

Will, conscience, honor, honesty,  
An' things o' thet description.

9. I believe in flattering the powers that be, for the sake of  
obtaining an office; and if my beggar's cup is filled all thought of sin is  
gone, for

I don't believe in princerple,  
But, O I du in interest.

10. I believe in political expediency, in adapting my opinions to  
conditions:

I scent wich pays the best, an' then  
Go into it baldheaded.

11. I believe in truckling to the slave-power, in being a "doughface"

12. I believe in any kind of propaganda that will duly keep the  
people in ignorance of the true state of affairs.

13. In a word, I believe in Humbug because of its solid value:

This heth my faithful shepherd ben,  
In pasturs sweet heth led me,  
An' this 'll keep the people green  
To feed ez they hev fed me.

Parson Wilbur's concluding note is another passage from his sermon on American journalism. He sees the weekly newspaper as a travelling Globe Theatre, in which the tragedy and comedy of life are portrayed; here Time shifts the scenes, and Death rings down the curtain. Not only does the newspaper provide him with a fine spectacle; it also unites him more intimately with his fellow-men. Its power, however, is a transient thing: today it presents a vision of life; tomorrow it will be used to wrap a bar of soap or to hold a beggar's victuals.

#### No. VII

Though the Mexican War made slavery the great national question of the day, the presidential campaign of 1848 evaded the issue to such an extent that no one knew the exact standing of the presidential candidates on this vital matter. Lowell summarized the qualifications of General Taylor, the Whig candidate, in one brief sentence: "He is a general, a slaveholder, and nobody knows what his opinions are."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, no platform at all, a vague platform, or a definite stand only on some obsolete issue was characteristic of all the presidential candidates.<sup>16</sup> Chameleonlike, they changed their opinions as political expediency dictated. Not content with condemning such servility in prose, Lowell made it the theme of one of the finest of Hosea's papers, "A Letter from a Candidate for the Presidency," which appeared in the Standard on June 1, 1848.

At first glance Parson Wilbur's introductory note seems to have little

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<sup>15</sup> "Presidential Candidates," The Anti-Slavery Papers of James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1902, I, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 60-67.

bearing on the subject of Hosea's poem. Men, he declares, may be divided into two classes, the inquisitive and the communicative. While the former are engaged in any occupation from eaves-dropping to the most intricate scientific experiments, the latter are constantly imparting information about self, about others, or about nothing at all. Letter-writing satisfies the passions of both classes, asking and answering. Among the various types of letters, those of candidates belong to a special class, but the Parson will treat them more fully in his note at the end of Hosea's poem.<sup>17</sup>

Hosea's letter to the editor of the Standard is essential to an understanding of his poem. In accordance with a custom of the day, Hosea was chosen to write letters to the presidential candidates in the name of his native Jaalam asking for the platforms of the various candidates. He is sending the editor one of the 209 answers he received to his 271 letters.

The candidate begins by professing his sincerity and forth-rightness, his refusal to be led by the nose. And so he proceeds to air his opinions "On sartin pints thet rile and 'rouse the land."<sup>18</sup> In the first place, he feels that the foundations of the country are rather unstable. He will not go into detail on the matter, but will content himself with declaring that he smells a rat. On second thought, however, he feels he must modify that statement. If the public thinks he is wrong, he will not deny that he is; in fact, the smell is not very strong at all. His "mind 's tu fair to lose its balance An' say

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17 Lowell, Biglow Papers, 139-142.

18 The quotations that follow are from ibid., 143-151.

wich party hez most sense." Indeed, since he, like all the other candidates, is on the fence, he intends to sit steady and to swerve neither to the right nor to the left. He is loath to choose between two sides. He leaves "a side thet looks like losin'," but so long as there is a doubt he sticks to both. He has adopted as his watchword that shibboleth of prudent statesman, "I stan' upon the Constitution."

But what are his opinions on specific questions of the day -- the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso, the abolition and the extension of slavery? The candidate's answers identify him as General Zachary Taylor, the colorless candidate of the Whigs. Within four short lines he passes from downright denunciation to unqualified approval of the war. He agrees whole-heartedly that war in the abstract is wicked,

But civilyzation doos git forrid  
Sometimes upon a powder-cart.

Concerning the Wilmot Proviso, which would forever exclude slavery from the territory ceded by Mexico, he has never had a doubt. He loves North and South equally; hence he will

jest answer plump an' frank,  
No matter wut may be the sequil, --  
Yes, Sir, I am agin the Bank.

Having made a definite stand on the obsolete question of the National Bank, the candidate proceeds to elucidate the vagueness of his political platform. He is averse to answering questions, though he will not shun a test that will boost his friends. He is not supporting a particular section but is working "Fer the holl country," and the ground he takes "Is pooty gen'ally all round." He does not believe in making definite pledges, for

Pledges air awfle breachy cattle  
 Thet preudunt farmers don't turn out, --  
 Ez long 's the people git their rattle,  
 Wut is there fer 'm to grout about?

There is no confusion in his ideas on slaves: to his mind "they air an Institution, A sort of -- yes, jest so, ahem." As to his owning slaves, he will let his reader judge that point for himself; the fact is, he does not drink and he has never signed a pledge.

The conclusion of the candidate's letter is a fitting climax to his series of evasions and equivocations:

Ez to my principles, I glory  
 In hevin' nothin' o' the sort;  
 I aint a Wig, I aint a Tory,  
 I 'm jest a canderdate in short;  
 Thet 's fair an' square an' parpendicler  
 But, ef the Public cares a fig  
 To hev me an' thin' in particler  
 Wy, I 'm a kind o' peri-Wig.

His postscript is meant for Hosea's ears only. If Hosea gets him inside the White House, he will see to it that Hosea is appointed keeper of the "light-house Down to the eend 'o [sic] Jaalam Pint." To pacify Northern objectors and at the same time promote the interests of the candidate, let Hosea tell his townsmen that on the slavery question the candidate is RIGHT, though he is loath to speak. Such a statement will give Hosea "safe pint to rest on," and will leave the candidate "frontin' South by North."

Parson Wilbur adds an incisive commentary on "epistles candidatial" to Hosea's poem. At election time, he declares, the United States becomes "a republic of letters." Every candidate is attacked by the writer's itch, so that a party dreads a letter from its own candidate more than the attacks of its opponents. When candidates write these letters, their object is to convey no

meaning at all; hence their letters approach very nearly the ancient oracles. The Parson would suggest that there may be as many interpretations as there are readers. There seems to be a growing tendency to demand less and less qualifications in candidates. Statesmanship, experience, and the possession, even the profession, of principles are considered superfluous. May not the ability to write soon descend into the realm of superfluities? Things have come to such a pass that anti-slavery may lie hidden in the flourish of a single letter.

#### No. VIII

With the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, the Mexican War was ostensibly brought to an end. Yet it remained one of the vital issues of the presidential campaign of 1848. Its heinousness, its futility, its degenerating effect on society and politics — these form the theme of the eighth Biglow paper, "A Second Letter from B. Sawin, Esq.," published in the Standard on July 6, 1848.

Parson Wilbur's comparatively brief introductory note has to do with the heinousness of the war from the point of view of its injustice, not toward the enemy nation, but toward the American soldiers themselves. The fire of a holy indignation smolders beneath the sorrowful words of the Parson as he compares the fate of a man-made mechanism with that of a child of Almighty God. The former is carefully housed and guarded; the latter, "with its fire of God in it," is "buffeted hither and thither, and finally sent carefully a thousand miles to be the target for a Mexican cannon-ball."<sup>19</sup>

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19 The quotations in this section are from ibid., 154-157, 159-165.

Birdofredum takes up the Parson's theme in a somewhat flippant tone that nevertheless betrays the successive stages of his utter disillusionment. The war is over, but he has not yet been discharged. His days of military usefulness, however, are at an end. He has lost a leg, an eye, his left arm, and all the fingers of his right hand except the thumb. In Massachusetts he had been made to believe that Mexico was a Promised Land,

Ware propaty growed up like time, without no cultivation,  
 An' gold wuz dug ez taters be among our Yankee nation,  
 Ware nateral advantages were pufficly amazin,'  
 Ware every rock there wuz about with precious stuns wuz blazin!

The reality, however, soon dispelled such ideas. His share of the spoils does not amount to five dollars. But thanks to the extremes of heat and rain, he will take one piece of property with him when he leaves Mexico -- malaria, "the shakin' fever."

Deprived of the hope of making a fortune, he had turned to the pursuit of glory. Again he was doomed to disappointment. For after every victory it was the generals and other officers who received the thanks; and if a mite of glory had come down to the privates, how could it have been divided among twenty thousand men, who are "jest the grist thet 's put into War's hoppers"? Glory, Birdofredum has decided, is a thing he will "pursue no furder, Coz thet 's the off'cers parquisite, -- yourn 's on'y jest the murder."

One source of satisfaction still remained to him: the experience of war would be glorious fun. But the fun, like the glory, was the exclusive privilege of the officers, and Birdofredum's revelling was limited to "bein' routed out o' sleep by that darned revelee."

The war has left Birdofredum a physically broken, spiritually disil-

lusioned man. But it has perpetrated a far more serious crime against him: It has set him firmly on the road to moral degeneracy to which his own weak character has ever beckoned him. Before he reaches the end of his letter, he will have revealed himself as the political rascal who will not hesitate to use the vilest means in order to attain his end.

Politics, he believes, is the one avenue to success that still lies open to him. Since the people must have a "milingtary man," he does not hesitate to set himself up as a candidate for the presidency. Certainly his qualifications are of the best: he has only one leg, and

There aint no kin' o' quality in can'idates, it's said,  
So useful ez a wooden leg, -- except a wooden head:

he has no principles, and never did have any; he is a "decided peace-man," for now that the war is over, "wut is there to go for?" He would advise his promoters to answer the inquiries of those who wish to know his opinions on state matters with such catch phrases as "WOODEN LEG" and "ONE EYE PUT OUT."

"Old Timbertoes," you see, 's a creed it 's safe to be quite  
bold on,

There 's nothin' in 't the other side can any ways git  
hold on;

.....  
It gives a Party Platform, tu, jest level with the mind  
Of all right-thinkin', honest folks thet mean to go it  
blind.

Only one qualification is a matter of concern to Birdofredum. The Constitution makes it necessary for a presidential candidate to be a Southerner and to own a slave of some kind. Birdofredum has no objection to the Southern climate, but since he has no capital to purchase a slave, he suggests that his promoters at home raise funds to enable him to buy a cheap slave. To satisfy those Northerners "who feel obleeged to say They hate an' cuss the very thing



they vote for every day," his promoters may boldly assert that he fully supports "Libbaty's diffusion An' made the purchis on'y jest to spite the Institution." The arrival of the courier puts an abrupt end to Birdofredum's missive.

In the comments he appends to Birdofredum's letter, the Parson reverts to his long-windedness. Using Birdofredum's experiences as a basis, he balances the glory of war with its price in human life, and finds the former pitifully inadequate. Next he considers government expenditures, particularly for the conduct of the Mexican War. He believes people would be more economical of the national resources if they realized that every time Brother Jonathan seems to be putting his hand into his own pocket, he is actually picking theirs. If American citizens knew that part of the money they pay for tea and coffee is used to buy powders and balls, and that Mexican blood makes their own clothing more costly, they would be set thinking. The Parson concludes by harking back to his original theme, the injustice and futility of war.

#### No. IX

The presidential campaign continued to be a pregnant topic for Lowell's pen throughout the summer of 1848. His caustic prose articles on presidential candidates, which had found their satire counterpart in Birdofredum's letter of July 6,<sup>20</sup> were followed by other prose articles on Webster's stand during

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<sup>20</sup> "Presidential Candidates," Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 60-67; "The Nominations for the Presidency," ibid., 93-99. See Appendix I for a brief summary of these articles.

those critical months and on the Free Soil Convention and its results.<sup>21</sup> Then, on September 28, 1848, "A Third Letter from B. Sawin, Esq." appeared in the Standard.

Parson Wilbur's introductory note is again a comparatively brief one. Birdofredum, he informs his readers, has suddenly cast aside his presidential aspirations and assumed the role of Cincinnatus, waiting to be called forth from his agricultural pursuits to more congenial labors. In so doing, he has followed the recognized pattern of American political comedy, in which the ancient Dictator is a stock character. Henry Clay's home at Ashland, Webster's at Marshfield, Harrison's at North Bend, Van Buren's at Kinderbrook, Taylor's at Baton Rouge, Birdofredum's at Jaalam — all these are replicas of the Roman dictator's rustic habitation, whence the successful candidate emerges only from a sense of duty or to which the defeated candidate returns with joy. It is significant, however, that in Southern replicas the laborers are kept carefully in the background and a sound not unlike howling proceeds from this background. The Parson has not been able to discover the precise connection between statesmanship and agricultural pursuits. He realizes, however, that Birdofredum's qualifications for the presidency are of the best. Since he has lost a leg, an arm, an eye, and four fingers, he has become so nearly a voice and nothing more that only the loss of his head could enhance his worth. Yet Birdofredum has chosen to withdraw.<sup>22</sup>

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21 "What Will Mr. Webster Do?" ibid., 108-115; "The Buffalo Convention," ibid., 123-127; "Turncoats," ibid., 151-157. See Appendix I.

22 Lowell, Biglow Papers, 173-175. The quotations that follow are from ibid., 175, 178-182, 184-185, 190, 193.

Birdofredum's fifteen-page epistle follows. In it he recounts his experiences of the past months, and advises his friends on matters political.

Like many another presidential candidate, Birdofredum had been well-nigh forced to accept his nomination. Popular enthusiasm had run so high that even he had not been able to deny that "The Father o' his Country's shoes" would fit no one better than him; besides, since he had one wooden leg, he would not need a pair of shoes, and consequently his election would mean a great saving to the country.

At the time of his nomination he had thought his ticket would easily carry the country. Since his return to Jaalam, however, he has begun to have serious doubts on that score. He realizes that the country is passing through a crisis, and rather than have the people confused by the necessity of choosing from a large number of candidates, Birdofredum, with patriotic detachment, has withdrawn from the contest. Before he returns to the plough, however, he wishes to define his political position.

He believes "Ole Zack" Taylor is the safest of the candidates still in the race. His reasons? In the first place, he has been "consid'ble round in barrooms an' saloons Agetherin' public sentiment, 'mongst Demmercrats and Coons," and he has rarely met anyone who was not for "Rough and Ready." The truth is, so long as Birdofredum himself was a candidate, he did not care too much for the Whig nominee; but now he is burning with zeal for Taylor, and laudably so, "Seein' wich way the tide thet sets to office is aturnin'."

Furthermore, Taylor has not made any pledges:

He hez n't told ye wut he is, an' so there aint no knowin'  
But wut he may turn out to be the best there is agoin';

consequently, every voter is free to expect what he pleases. Taylor is a Whig, to be sure, but not of the extreme type; he is rather "like a holsome hayinday, thet 's warm, but is n't sultry." Birdofredum's three-weeks' experience of being a Whig of this moderate type has taught him that there is little difference between Whigs and Democrats:

They both act pooty much alike, an' push an' scrouge an' cus;  
 They 're like two pickpockets in league fer Uncle Samwell's pus;  
 Each takes a side, an' then they squeeze the old man in between 'em,  
 Turn all his pockets wrong side out an' quick ez lighntnin' clean 'em;  
 To nary one on 'em I 'd trust a secon' -handed rail  
 No funder off 'n I could sling a bullock by the tail.

Indeed, Birdofredum agrees with Daniel Webster that though Taylor is not fit for the position, it is just as well to vote for him as for anyone else; and then Birdofredum caustically adds,

It takes a mind like Dannel 's, fact, ez big ez all ou' doors  
 To find out thet it looks like rain arter it fairly pours.

Leading Whigs have "kin' o' slipt the planks from out th' ole platform one by one, An' made it gradooally noo," till there is scarcely an inch on which Birdofredum "or any Demmercrat, feels com'table to stan' on."

Next Birdofredum airs his views on the Free Soil Party and its candidate, Van Buren. The latter "aint half anti-slav'ry 'nough," nor does he seem inclined to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. The Free Soil Party, Birdofredum thinks, is not strong enough to rouse Northerners to action. Besides, he does not care for the leaders of the party. At one of their meetings he heard a speaker who had actually come to him two years before and asked him to take the temperance pledge, and, he frankly avers,

There 's one rule I've ben guided by, in settlin' how to vote, ollers  
 I take the side thet is n't took by them consarned teetotallers.

Finally, Birdofredum discusses the critical issue of the day, slavery. He hates slavery in the abstract, to be sure, but since he has been south he has changed his mind about slaves; "A lazier, more ongrateful set you could n't nowere find." His own experience has confirmed this opinion.

Not having the money to buy a negro he had decided to lay hands on a fugitive slave. Luck was with him. He soon came upon a certain Pomp and his children, and at the point of a gun he began to drive them back to Southern territory. But when noon came, he sat down to rest and took off his wooden leg which had begun to chafe him. While he was estimating what he would get for his lot of negroes, and now and then interspersing his meditations with a swallow of whiskey, Pomp stole up behind him, took his wooden leg, and refused to return it unless Birdofredum would throw away his pistol and his gun. The tables were turned. Birdofredum had to trudge back to Pomp's home and there for six months not only work on his little farm but even teach him to read, despite the law of slave-holding states that forbade education to slaves and to free people of color. When the small crop had been harvested, Pomp had rudely put him on the road again.

In view of this experience, Birdofredum indignantly concludes his message:

Now is there any thin' on airth 'll ever prove to me  
 That renegader slaves like him air fit fer bein' free?  
 D' you think they 'll suck me in to jine the Buff'lo chaps, an' them  
 Rank infidels thet go agin the Scriptur'l cus o' Shem?  
 Not by a jugfull! sooner 'n thet, I 'd go thru fire an' water;  
 Wen I hev once made up my mind, a meet'nhus aint sotter;  
 No, not though all the crows thet flies to pick my bones wuz cawin', --  
 I guess we 're in a Christian land, --

Yourn,

BIRDOFREDUM SAWIN.

With this message from Birdofredum the first series of Biglow Papers ends. Parson Wilbur adds a note in which he bids farewell to his patient, kind readers and acknowledges he may have taken advantage of Hosea's request for advice and correction to vent his own doctrines to a congregation that had come of set purpose to hear Hosea. Yet he has tried to adapt himself to the impatient temper of his age by keeping his remarks within somewhat narrow limits. The sight of Hosea gathering his Baldwins reminds the Parson of "those orchards of the mind" that are the proper field of his labor, and so he turns from the discussion of matters political to the preparation of his next "Sabbath's discourse."

## CHAPTER V

### THE BIGLOW PAPERS, SECOND SERIES: AN ANALYTIC STUDY

For approximately a decade after the publication of Birdofredum Sawin's third letter, Lowell did not raise his voice on the slavery issue. Yet not even the death of his wife and his consequent retirement from the public eye could deaden his sensibilities on national questions. Though his own name and that of his mouthpiece, Hosea Biglow, no longer appeared in anti-slavery periodicals, letters of this period testify to his deep interest in the crucial issue of the day. So he wrote to Miss Loring on May 29, 1854:

Is not all this about that poor fugitive Burns nasty? I can find no other word. I do not like to think that the natural instincts of Massachusetts are all snobbish, but it would take a good deal to convince me that they are not. They seem to take a positive pleasure in doing anything for a man whom they think an aristocrat; and while the Virginia newspapers are descanting on the meritoriousness of shooting Yankee schoolmasters, they are inviting a Virginia slave-hunter to dinner. By St. Paul! if things go on and the old Puritan spirit once get up again (if it be not dead), we may send them schoolmasters such as Oliver sent to Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

Again, when feeling on the status of Kansas was rife and Preston Brooks of South Carolina had broken his cane over Senator Sumner's head in order to avenge the latter's language in his speech "The Crime against Kansas," Lowell with typical New England indignation, wrote from Dresden to his friend Dr. Estes Howe:

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<sup>1</sup> James Russell Lowell, Letters of James Russell Lowell, edited by Charles Eliot Norton, New York, 1893, I, 212.

There never was anything more brutal [than the assault on Sumner]<sup>1</sup>.  
 How long are such things to be borne? And in the midst of it  
 Massachusetts repeals the Personal Liberty Bill -- eats 'umble-pie,  
 and takes back the only thing worthy of herself she has done for  
 years.<sup>2</sup>

After his return to the United States and during the first years of his professorship, Lowell continued to watch with interest the course of events in Kansas. At that time the idea came to him of taking Hosea Biglow to Kansas "to send his prophecies from what was really the seat of the war."<sup>3</sup> For the time being, however, the plan came to naught. To the requests of friends that Parson Wilbur procure more verses from Hosea, he replied that he did not have time to brood.<sup>4</sup>

In May, 1861, he resigned the editorship of the Atlantic Monthly and thus secured the time he needed for writing poetry. During the fall of that year he wrote the first of the second series of Biglow Papers, which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in January, 1862. Of the ten articles that made up the second series as published in book form, eight appeared in the Atlantic between February, 1862, and May, 1866; the other two, both "lucubrations" of Parson Wilbur only, Lowell added when he assembled the articles for publication in a single volume. All deal directly or indirectly with the Civil War. They may well be regarded as war propaganda, just as the first series may be considered

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2 Ibid., 261.

3 Edward Everett Hale, James Russell Lowell and His Friends, Boston, 1899, 171.

4 Ferris Greenslet, James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1905, 156.



campaign material. Lowell's poetic genius had had its first flowering in Hosea's verses on the Mexican War. "In losing himself in the mood of the war effort, he was poetically to find himself again."<sup>5</sup>

### No. I

Lowell's triple mouthpiece reappears before the public in "Birdofredum Sawin, Esq., to Mr. Hosea Biglow." As usual, Parson Wilbur has the first word, and a drawn-out epistle it is. The passing of the years has not lessened the Parson's longwindedness, nor has it weakened his fondness for scraps of Latin. Indeed, during the decade between his last and his present appearance in print, his loquacity and egotism seem to have increased, for his prefatory notes to this as well as to succeeding contributions of his parishioner Hosea Biglow are longer than those accompanying the first series. Possibly the good man wishes to compensate his readers for the omission of comments after Hosea's papers.

On the present occasion the Parson is writing

by the express desire of Mr. Biglow himself, whose entire winter leisure is occupied ... in answering demands for autographs, a labor exacting enough in itself, and egregiously so to him, who, being no ready penman cannot sign so much as his own name without strange contortions of the face (his nose, even, being essential to complete success) and painfully suppressed Saint-Vitus-dance of every muscle of his body.<sup>6</sup>

After plodding faithfully through the labyrinth of the Parson's remarks on his "historical lucubrations," his genealogy and that of his wife, his retirement

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5 Ferris Greenslet, The Lowells and Their Seven Worlds Boston, 1946, 304.

6 The quotations of this section are taken from James Russell Lowell, The Biglow Papers, 5th edition, Boston, 1890, 293-294, 296-297, 301-302, 302, 304, 305, 307-308, 310, 312-319.

from active service, his bodily and intellectual vigor at the age of eighty, his son's enlistment in the Union army, weather conditions and events of interest in Jaalam — remarks which the editors of the Atlantic Monthly find it necessary to cut short — the reader emerges with the following information about Hosea and his present article: Hosea begs his readers to be patient with him "till he shall again have 'got the hang' (as he calls it) of an accomplishment long disused"; Mr. Sawin's letter reached Hosea in June, 1861, and others have followed, which Hosea also intends to translate into verse; whether all of Birdofredum's statements are to be accepted at face value is doubtful, for he was always inclined to exaggerate; yet common knowledge of Southern customs as well as Birdofredum's lack of striking powers of invention make the Parson willing to put some faith in Birdofredum's narrative.

Birdofredum's epistle bridges the gap between his encounter with Pompey, narrated in the last of the first series of Biglow Papers, his present status as a Southern plantation owner. In narrating his own experiences Birdofredum also gives a realistic picture of conditions in the South in 1861.

His reason for not having written for so long a time is because he has been in jail, or, as he puts it

...where a litt'ry taste don't somehow seem to git  
 Th' encouragement a feller 'd think, thet's used  
                                 to public schools,  
 An' where sech things ez paper 'n' ink air clean  
                                 agin the rules:  
 A kind o' vicyvarsy house, built dreffle strong an'  
                                 stout,  
 So 's 't honest people can't git in, ner t' other sort  
                                 get out,  
 An' with the winders so contrived, you 'd prob'ly  
                                 like the view  
 Better alookin' in than out, though it seems sin-  
                                 g'lar, tu;

But then the landlord sets by ye, can't bear ye  
                   out o' sight,  
 And locks ye up ez reg'lar ez an outside door at  
                   night.

Life, Birdofredum believes, is largely a game of Chance, "an' ef the  
 fust throw fails, Why, up an' try agin, thet 's all, — the coppers ain't all  
 tails." So, after his unfortunate adventure with Pomp, he turned his face to-  
 ward the South and finally arrived "where folks wuz civerlized and white," only  
 to be accused of having stolen "yaller chettle" and to be clothed in the tradi-  
 tional coat of tar and feathers:

The jury 'd sot, an' quicker 'n a flash,  
                   they hatched me out, a livin'  
 Extemp'ry mamoth turkey-chick fer Fejee  
                   Thanksgiven'.

Then he was made to ride the rail and was treated to a barrage of rotten eggs.  
 Such is Southern hospitality for a Northerner.

After these preliminaries he was now sentenced to ten years' imprison-  
 ment. He did not attempt much of a defense, for, as he says,

...you don't feel much like speakin'  
 When, ef you let your clamshells gape, a quart  
                   o' tar will leak in;  
 I hev hearn tell o' winged words, but pint o' fact  
                   it tethers  
 The spoutin' gift to hev your words tu thick sot on  
                   with feathers,  
 An' Choate ner Webster would n't ha' made an A l kin'  
                   o' speech  
 Astride a Southern chestnet horse sharper 'n a  
                   baby's screech.

Eventually the real thief was caught, and Birdofredum released. All that his  
 captors now required of him was that he pay for the featherbed they had taken  
 from the widow Shannon to give Birdofredum his special suit of clothes. They  
 even took up a subscription for him, but this, like the Confederate bands which



mination never to come back North, his new religion, and the fact that she is now an alien enemy,

Fer sence we 've entered on th' estate o' the late  
     nayshnul eagle,  
 She hain't no kin' o' right but jes' wut I allow ez legle;  
 Wut doos Secedin' mean, ef 't ain't thet nat'rul rights  
     hez riz, 'in  
 Thet wut is mine 's my own, but wut 's another man's  
     ain't jes his'n?

Besides, Birdofredum had no choice in the matter. The widow, whose son was a member of the jury that had condemned Birdofredum, had threatened him with a second taste of Southern hospitality unless he agreed to become her overseer. Birdofredum knows, however, that one of her principal motives in marrying him was to have a cultured gentleman, one who could read and write, at her side "To talk along o' preachers when they stopt to the plantation." For illiteracy is common in the South; a member of the "soshle higherarchy" needs to know just a little more than the "evrage darky." Too much schooling "might spile a boy for bein' a Secesher." Religion in the South is limited to the sermons of itinerant ministers.

Birdofredum has much more to write, particularly about secession; but he must bring his letter to a close, for, he concludes:

I'm called off now to mission-work, to let a  
     litttle law in  
 To Cynthy's hide: an' so, till death  
     Yourn,  
     BIRDOFREDUM SAWIN.

## No. II

Birdofredum's half-boastful, half-apologetic air in his letter to Hosea had provided Lowell with a fine weapon for satirizing general conditions

in the South: the barbarity of its treatment of Northerners, its financial embarrassment, its illiteracy, its lack of real culture. Once he had won his audience, he could abandon the half-truth of generalizations and devote his attention to particular problems of the war.

At the end of 1861 no topic called forth more comment than the so-called Trent affair. In October, 1861, James M. Mason and John Slidell, Confederate agents to England, after eluding the Northern blockade and reaching Havana, embarked for England on A British vessel, the Trent. The vessel was stopped by a Union man-of-war under Captain Wilkes, and Mason and Slidell were taken prisoners and transferred to the American vessel. England indignantly demanded that the prisoners be released and reparation made; at the same time she prepared to open hostilities with the United States. In view of the fact that the United States had for long years denounced the impressment by England of British seamen on board neutral vessels, and in consideration of the dangers of war with England at the particular time, Secretary of State Seward deemed it expedient to disavow the action of Wilkes and to release the prisoners. According to international law, a neutral vessel is not justified in carrying belligerents on a hostile mission, and at the time popular feeling both in England and in the United States was intense. Lowell took occasion to present the American view in "Mason and Slidell: A Yankee Idyll," which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in February, 1862.

Parson Wilbur again encloses Hosea's poem in a letter to the editors of the Atlantic. He cannot forego a reference to the publication of his letter the preceding month, even though it was printed, as he says, "in a type which rendered its substance inaccessible even to the beautiful new spectacles

presented to me by a Committee of the Parish on New-Year's Day."<sup>7</sup> Nor can he refrain from expressing his regret at the editor's cutting short his anecdote about Deacon Tinkham.

But even the Parson's egotism must yield to the seriousness of Hosea's subject. And so, after making a brief distinction between idyllic and pastoral poetry and showing that Hosea's poem truly belongs to both classes, the Parson launches into a discussion of the Mason and Slidell question; as is some of the comments on the first series of Biglow papers, the reader feels that Lowell is dropping the mask of the Parson and is presenting, not popular sentiment, but his personal views in the pages that follow. But the impetuosity and resentful indignation of the earlier papers have given way to a deliberate restraint that marks a man matured by age and suffering. His attitude toward the entire Trent affair is one of sorrow rather than of resentment. He believes that England "has undone the healing work of fifty years; for nations do not reason, they only feel, and the spretæ injuria formæ rankles in their minds as bitterly as in that of a woman." He is proud that the United States has replied to England's challenge by admitting her mistake and thus giving proof of having attained to man's estate.

But what is to be said of England's policy since the beginning of the Civil War? Some of her ministers have stigmatized that war as unholy, declaring that "the Rebels were fighting for independence and we for empire." Lord Russell did not realize the import of his words, which would condemn practically

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<sup>7</sup> The quotations in this section are from *ibid.*, 320, 325, 327, 329-330, 334, 336-337, 339, 342, 342-343, 345, 346, 348, 350, 355-356.

every war England has ever waged.

It is not national vanity that has caused American irritability, but rather England's

quiet assumption that the descendants of men who left the Old World for the sake of principle, and who had made the wilderness into a New World patterned after an Idea, could not possibly be susceptible of a generous or lofty sentiment, could have no feeling of nationality deeper than that of a tradesman for his shop.

Her haste in recognizing the Confederacy, her abruptness in the Trent affair, her fitting out of Confederate privateers, her moral support of the Rebels, her sudden and unaccountable change from fervent avowals of friendship to open contempt — these affronts, even England must admit, were sufficient to rouse American indignation and even to cause a permanent estrangement between the United States and England.

In an individual, bearing a grudge is the mark of a small mind; in a nation, it cannot be the sign of a high spirit. The result of the present estrangement between the two countries may well be greater independence of British "twaddle," but let it not be a foolish cutting off of ourselves from the advantages of English culture, for

England is not the England only of snobs who dread the democracy they do not comprehend, but the England of history, of heroes, statesmen, and poets, whose names are dear, and their influence as salutary to us as to her.

Parson Wilbur's conclusion to his letter is a word of advice to his fellow citizens. Let them leave the conduct of the war to those charged with it. They have chosen a commander-in-chief; it is his to plan the battles. Hence they will do well to bridle their own tongues and to restrain the pens of those who, by revealing official secrets, are conveying useful intelligence to



the enemy; "if tongues be leaky, it will need all hands at the pumps to save the Ship of State."

Hosea's first verses transport the reader from the Parson's study to the New England countryside, where

. . .arter night 's begun  
An' all the chores about the farm are done,  
The critters milked an' foddered, gates shet fast,  
An' Nancy darnin' by her ker'sene lamp, --

Hosea loves to start out on a tramp to some of his favorite spots -- the Concord road, the field of Lexington, and Concord Bridge.

But it is December now, and in lieu of a visit to these places, Hosea is content with a walk to the top of Prospect Hill. As the night grows still and the village lights go out, he hears the muffled crowing of some wise rooster insisting "thet moon-rise is the break of day," and he is reminded of Secretary of State Seward's prophecy that the war with the South would be over in sixty days. But as he stands there just musing, the past and the present merge, the fence posts turn into ghosts of soldiers; he sees the flash of the sentry's gun and hears his challenge and the low reply. Then he discerns two voices "somm 'ners in the air," and he finally comes to think that Concord Bridge is talking with the monument on Bunker Hill:

Whether 't was so, or ef I on'y dreamed,  
I could n't say; I tell it ez it seemed.

The conversation between the bridge and the monument follows, and forms the principal part of Hosea's poem. From the excitement among the British "sogers" in Concord graveyard the night before, the bridge knows that something untoward has happened and asks the monument for information. With many interruptions on the part of the vast bridge, the monument finally suc-

ceeds in narrating the details of the Trent affair and explaining England's interpretation of the arrest of Mason and Slidell. The bridge, the reader soon realizes, is the embodiment of popular indignation, while the monument represents the conservatism that would avert a catastrophe without sacrificing integrity.

So the bridge denounces England's tactics on land and sea:

I tell ye, England's law, on sea an' land,  
 Hez ollers ben, "I've gut the heaviest hand."  
 . . . . .  
 Of all the sarse thet I can call to mind,  
 England doos make the most onpleasant kind:  
 It's you're the sinners ollers, she 's the saint;  
 Wut 's good 's all English, all thet is n't ain't;  
 Wut profits her is ollers right an' just,  
 An' ef you don't read Scriptur so, you must;  
 . . . . .  
 She 's all thet 's honest, honnable an' fair,  
 An' when the vartooos died they made her heir.

The monument replies that "two wrongs don't never make a right; Ef we're mistaken, own up, an' don't fight." Then, as the bridge continues to rail, the monument tries to explain England's motive:

Wut England wants is jest a wedge to fit  
 Where it 'll help to widen out our split:  
 She 's found the wedge, an' 't aint for us to come  
 An' lend the beetle thet 's to force it home.

It is for us, the monument contends, to act the part of grown-ups and not be too much excited by England's talk. As soon as we can prove that we are going to win the war, England will change her mind and

We're boun' to be good friends, an' so we 'd  
                   oughto,  
 In spite of all the fools both sides the water.

The bridge is finally won over to the monument's way of thinking.

When the monument begins to lament the duration and the cost of the war, it is

the bridge's turn to play mentor and to expound the proper attitude toward the war:

We've gut to fix this thing for good an' all;  
It 's no use buildin' wut 's a-goin' to fall.

If the Southern states are allowed to secede, there will be new trouble within a short time. Law and order, honor and civil right are at stake; the war is worth every sacrifice it will cost, for it will settle the question of union once for all.

When the monument is convinced of the truth of the bridge's argument, the latter breaks forth into an apostrophe to the New World, which must be "A better country than man ever see." But its majestic words are interrupted by the barking of dogs, and Hosea's reverie comes to an end.

As he walks home, he puts his own thoughts into rime. His jingling "Jonathan to John" in nine-line stanzas of iambic tetrameters alternating with trimeters, reminiscent of "What Mr. Robinson Thinks," forms a sharp contrast to the heroic couplets of the first part of Hosea's contribution. Again it is the voice of popular indignation that speaks in Jonathan, but it is popular indignation calmed down by deliberation, and explaining to John Bull in no uncertain terms precisely why the United States is avowing its mistake, and what the Civil War really means. The final stanza deserves to be quoted:

God means to make this land, John,  
Clear thru, from sea to sea,  
Believe an' understand, John,  
Ole Uncle S. Sez he, "I guess  
God's price is high, "sez he;  
"But nothin' else than wut He sells  
Wears long, an' thet J. B.  
May larn, like you an' me!"

## No. III

If Southern insistence on the legitimacy of slavery and on the natural aristocracy of the white man was one of the prime causes of the Civil War, Northern political graft was no less so. These subjects became the target of Lowell's satire in the third paper of the second series, "Birdofredum Sawin, Esq., to Mr. Hosea Biglow," published in the Atlantic Monthly in March, 1862.

In his introductory letter to the editors of the Atlantic, Parson Wilbur cannot refrain from animadverting at some length to Birdofredum's criticism of his sermons. Next he discusses social superiority of the South, and points out that many Southern aristocrats are descended from "the sweepings of the London streets and the leavings of the London stews."<sup>8</sup> He calls attention to the shallowness of aristocracy in general, since it rests on wealth, and he declares that "aristocracy of America are the descendants of those who first became wealthy, by whatever means." He questions the sincerity of what Birdofredum calls his convictions, for he believes that the ultimate victory of the North eventually will find him and many other newly initiated Southerners original Union men. He suggests that Birdofredum's criticisms on Northern failings be given serious consideration. In his concluding paragraph he again reverts to his scholarly tendencies, promising the editors a report on the Runic inscription of a relic recently discovered in Jaalam.

For a second time Birdofredum's boastfulness becomes a two-edged sword with which Lowell attacks both Southern complacency and Northern graft.

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<sup>8</sup> The quotations in this section are from ibid., 361, 363, 368-370, 372-375, 379, 382, 384-385, 387.

Birdofredum begins his letter with an account of his religious conversion which amounts to an apology for slavery on religious grounds. Up North, he says, there were any number of sects, but none of them quite suited him because they all demanded good works; in the South he has "found out The true fus'-fem'ly A l plan," which gives him the privilege of "perfessin' right on eend 'thout nary need of doin'." Attendance at one camp meeting was enough to convert him to this religion, for here besides the Scriptural arguments that were brought forth in defense of slavery, there was the added attraction of drink that could be had in a nearby tent. The speaker's insistence that negroes had been given into the keeping of the white man; that it was much more profitable to bring the raw material of negroes to the South

Where you can work it inta grace an' inta cotton, tu,  
Than sendin' missionaries out where fevers might  
                    defeat 'em,  
An' ef the butcher did n't call, they're p'rishioners  
                    might eat 'em;

that slavery improved white men by freeing them from the need of working -- all these agruments, aided by drink and Birdofredum's desire to win favor with the widow Shannon soon convinced him of the truth of this religion, so that "when nine tenths o' th' perrish took to tumblin' roun' an' hollerin'," he found no difficulty "in th' way o' turnin' to an' follerin'." The result was marriage with the widow. That step brought about a second change of opinion, for as a Southerner Birdofredum was bound to uphold the natural superiority of Southern blood over Northern. Nobility is not difficult to acquire in the South,

For while your lords in furrin parts ain't noways  
                    marked by nature',  
Nor sot apart from ornery folks in featur's nor  
                    in figgers,  
Ef oun'll keep their faces washed, you 'll

know 'em from their niggers.

Such people "can't bemean themselves to rulin' by a Lincoln." Birdofredum himself has hired a man to get him a "transplantable an' thrifty fem'ly tree," one that will guarantee him a place with the "Pickenees, Boggses, Pettuses, Magof-fins, Letchers, Polks."

For all of his newly acquired aristocracy, however, Birdofredum was at first not in favor of seceding. He would have preferred to let South Carolina make reasonable trial of secession and then to take sides with the more successful party. After President Buchanan allowed forts, arms, and cannon to be handed over to the South, he joined the group that believed in letting the Union continue provided the North would let the South control the government.

Jefferson Davis, however, has methods of making Southerners "unanner-mous": riding the rail, lynching, tar and feathers. Birdofredum admits that he, like many others, became convinced of the necessity of secession, adding:

An' I should say, (to jedge our folks by facs in  
my possession,)
   
Thet three 's Unannermous where one 's a 'Riginal
   
Secession.

To give things "a cherfile look" and to stiffen "loose-hung sperits" Jefferson Davis has assumed control of the Southern press, so that newspapers are allowed to print only that which the government chose. Consequently, though the South is practically drained of food-stuffs and all other supplies, the newspapers insist that all was well. As Birdofredum puts it:

Nex' thing to knowin' you 're well off is nut  
to know when y' ain't;
   
An' ef Jeff says all 's goin' wal, who'll
   
ventur' t' say it ain't?

As for Southern Congressmen, they are mere puppets, playing their

part behind closed doors, while Davis, who carries the Constitution around in his hat, manages affairs as he pleases.

Up to this point in Birdofredum's letter, Lowell has been attacking the South. Now, still using Birdofredum as his mouthpiece, he points out Northern failings that are hindering the successful issue of the war.

"I've chose my side," Birdofredum declares, and as long as the North continues the way of political graft, he will not change his opinion. What are his accusations against the North? It elects to Congress men who want to go "Cuz they can't seem to git their grub no otherways but so," while it lets its best men, men who are too honorable to make empty promises, stay at home. It grants "claims" to a politician who has managed to keep "his private pan jest where 't would ketch mos' public drippins." Its leading men have risen by playing into each other's hands, that is, by grinding each other's axes. It gives commissions to officers "Thet trade in whiskey with their men an' skin 'em to the bones." It picks out "safe" condidates, men whom the public does not fear because they have never done anything that has brought them before the public eye. It makes popularity the one and only requisite for election. It always has room in Congress for one more rascal, one who is "Jest heavy 'nough to turn a scale thet 's doubtfle the wrong way." These are Birdofredum's grievances, and he concludes his letter to Hosea:

Long 'z them things last, (an' I don't see no gret  
signs of improvin',)

I sha' n't up stakes, not hardly yit, nor't would n't  
pay for movin':

For, 'fore you lick us, it 'll be the long'st day ever you see.

Yourn, [ez I 'xpec' to be nex' spring,]

B., Markiss o' Big Boosy

## No. IV

Birdofredum's second letter on conditions in the South had scarcely been published when, on March 10, 1862, Parson Wilbur again wrote to the editors of the Atlantic Monthly, enclosing another poem by his parishioner Hosea Biglow. The paper was entitled "A Message of Jeff Davis in Secret Session -- Conjecturally reported by H. Biglow," and appeared in the April number of the Atlantic.

Parson Wilbur's comparatively brief introductory letter is concerned primarily with the question of the emancipation of slaves. He illustrates his theory of waiting by means of a parable in verse entitled "Festina Lente." Then he comments briefly on emancipation itself, strongly recommending the policy followed by President Lincoln of first enlisting the sympathies of the Border States. Two sentences of the Parson's are worth quoting:

To make Emancipation a reform instead of a revolution is worth a little patience, that we may have the Border States first, and then the non-slaveholders of the Cotton States, with us in principle, -- a consummation that seems to be nearer than many imagine. . . . Our first duty toward our enslaved brother is to educate him, whether he be white or black.<sup>9</sup>

His final paragraph is a comment on the battle of Hampton Roads.

Unfortunately, however, only the first part of the battle has been reported; the Parson does not as yet know of the fight between the Monitor and the Merimac that took place on March 9, 1862, and ended in victory for the North; hence his remarks on the Devil's adopting the latest inventions of destructive warfare.

Only in his postscript does the Parson mention the real purpose of

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9 The quotations in this section are from *ibid.*, 392-395, 397-404.



his letter; to enclose a contribution from Hosea.

One of the devices of war propaganda is to paint a black picture of the enemy's condition in order to raise the morale of the other side. Such was evidently Lowell's purpose in publishing Birdofredum's two letters to Hosea. In this fourth article of the second series he goes a step further: he allows Hosea to make use of the poetical license of reporting a message supposedly delivered by Jefferson Davis in secret session. His theme is the financial and moral extremity of the South. Hosea makes no personal observations in this poem; he lets Jefferson Davis himself speak.

Throughout the poem Davis is portrayed as a most unscrupulous of leaders, a man who exemplifies the principle that the end justifies the means. To his Congress he admits that his message on the establishment of the Confederacy was intended to win France and Great Britain to the Confederate cause and to throw sand into the eyes of the Southern people:

I need n't tell you thet my mesage wuz written  
To diffuse correc' notions in France an' Gret Britten,  
An' agin to impress on the poppylar mind  
The comfort an' wisdom o' goin' it blind.

The South, he declares, has all the elements of "a fus' — class, self-governin' power:" a war, a debt, and a flag. There is nothing to hinder it from taking its place with the great powers of the world,

Excep', wal, excep' jest a very few things,  
Sech ez navies an' armies an' wherewith to pay,  
An' gittin' our sogers to ren t' other way,  
An' not be too over-pertickler in tryin'  
To hunt up the very las' ditches to die in.

Some people are so base that they want to know precisely what the South has gained by seceding. With such people one must assume a confident

tone, but to his Congress in secret session Davis admits that "Things look blacker'n thunder." The Confederacy is not only financially but also morally bankrupt:

We're clean out o' money, an' 'most out o' lyin' --  
 Two things a young nation can't mennage without,  
 Ef she wants to look wal at her fust comin' out;  
 For the fust supplies physickle strength, while the second  
 Gives a morril edvantage thet 's hard to be reckoned.

He himself will take care of the lying; from his Congressmen he asks a plan for getting acceptable letters of credit. Several proposals have been made, but they have flaws. Hanging all bankers would be helpful if they still had anything to lose besides their lives. Burning cities and towns in order to collect insurance would be impracticable since the insurance would be paid in worthless Confederate money, and such a course would damage foreign credit. Buying up all the cotton and burning it, on a pledge of restoring it after the war, then using the proceeds as security for an issue of bonds to be paid in cash immediately after the war, might be a feasible plan for borrowing money from England, were it not for the fact that that country had suffered great losses on a similar loan to Southern states in the thirties. As for the great company of Floyd's taking the loan, the important thing at present is to get ready money:

. . . we need now more 'n ever, with sorrer I own,  
 Thet some one another shoud let us a loan,  
 Sence a soger wun't fight, on'ly jes' while he draws his  
 Pay down on the nail, for the best of all causes,  
 'thout askin' to know wut the quarrel 's about, --  
 An' once come to thet, why, our game is played out, --

Indeed, the problem of satisfying the queries of people regarding Southern finances has become such a pressing one that Davis would gladly bear the other

risks if he could be delivered from this problem:

I'd gladly take all of our other resks on me  
To be red o' this low-lived politikle 'con'my.

No matter how often the Congress votes that the Confederacy is prospering, the fact of its being starved will not change. What gains the Southern cause made in foreign countries through the victory at Bull Run have all been lost as a result of the defeats that followed.

If only the Confederacy had got foreign recognition, things would be different. And how easily that recognition might have been won if Lincoln had hanged Mason and Slidell and thus made martyrs of them!

But whatever schemes the South has tried, they have all failed. There is only one chance left, and that is to use as our tools Northern Democrats like Belmont, Vallandigham, and the two Woods brothers, advocates of peace and conciliation. They are such base creatures that in ordinary times Southerners would not deign to associate with them:

Why, for my part, I'd ruther shake hands with a  
nigger  
Than with cusses that load an' don't darst dror a  
trigger:

.....  
They ain't wuth a cuss, an' I set nothin' by 'em,  
But we're in sech a fix thet I s'pose  
we mus' try 'em.

Just then a messenger comes in with a dispatch to the effect that since the capture of Fort Donelson, Tennessee, by the Union troops in February, 1862, it had become impossible for the Confederate to continue its occupation of Columbus, Kentucky, and that Beauregard had given orders for its evacuation. What impudent rascality: Davis twists defeat into victory and brings his speech to a sensational close:

. . . But Gennlemen, here 's a dispatch jes' come in  
Which shows thet the tide 's begun turnin' agin, —  
Gret Cornfedrit success! hev the thing properly stated,  
An' show wut a triumph it is, an' how lucky  
To fin'lly git red o' thet cussed Kentucky, --  
An' how, sence Fort Donelson, winnin' the day  
Consists in triumphantly gittin' away.

# No. V

The first four articles of the second series of Biglow Papers had aimed at building up Northern morale by showing the barbarism of Southern practices like riding the rail and tar and feathering, and by revealing the desperate straits in which the Confederacy found itself both financially and morally.

The fifth article was an expose' of the tactics of Northern traitors, politicians who had favored the South before the war and who were already planning how to keep their purses filled once the war was over. This article appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in May, 1862, under the title "Speech of Honorable Preserved Doe in Secret Caucus."

Parson Wilbur's seven-page introductory letter has no bearing whatsoever on the topic of Hosea's poem. Confident of the ultimate success of the Union army, the Parson gladly puts aside the thought of war to devote himself to a lengthy discussion of the Runic inscription referred to in a previous letter of his. At the end of this letter he merely mentions that he is enclosing a contribution from Hosea.

In this poem Lowell makes use of the same device he employed in one of the articles of the first series, "Remarks of Increase D. O'Phace, Esquire, at an Extrumpety Caucus in State Street." He does not attack low-down politicians directly, but exposes the baseness of their tactics by presenting a speech

delivered at one of the secret meetings of the political machine.

The scene may easily be reconstructed: A large room in the rear of a tavern, reserved for members of the machine. A group of coarse, loud-mouthed individuals is seated round the table, smoking and drinking freely of the liquor placed before them. As the Honorable Preserved Doe, the political boss, enters, the group applauds loudly. Then all is quiet, and the boss begins his speech:

I thank ye, my fren's, for the warmth o' your  
greetin':  
Ther' 's few airthly blessin's but wut 's vain  
an' fleetin';  
But ef ther' 's one thet hain't no cracks an'  
flaws,  
An' is wuth goin' in for, it 's pop'lar applause.<sup>10</sup>

Popularity, to use a Scriptural comparison, is not only having Canaan in view, but "Canaan paid quarterly"; it is "a-follerin' Moses 'thout losin' the flesh-pots." But at this secret caucus, to which not the people themselves but "on'y their frien's" have been invited, he must not use this kind of eloquence, for the men that are present are the men who make public opinion:

I forgut thet we 're all 'o the sort thet pull wires  
An' arrange for the public their wants an' desires,  
An' thet wut we hed met for wuz jes' to agree  
Wut the People's opinions in futur' should be.

The difficulty now is that all their plans have gone awry. Things ought to have turned out differently:

But The'ry is jes' like a train on the rail,  
Thet, weather or no, puts her thru without fail,  
While Fac's the ole stage thet gits sloughed  
in the ruts,  
An' hez to allow for your darned efs an' buts.

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10 The quotations in this section are from ibid., 413-417, 419-421, 423-425.

According to the plans of the machine, Jefferson Davis should now be in Lincoln's place, with Chief Justice Taney at his side to declare that everything has been done in accordance with the Constitution. Things had been going on well under Buchanan. The machine had been going in for the Union so long as "Union meant South ollers right an' North wrong," when the people, who never can be relied on, conceived the idea that the Union "might Worry on middlin' wal with the North in the Right." If the Honorable Doe had known during his term in Congress that the North would rise and take a definite stand, and that Southerners would turn and flee before "mean white folks," he would not have been so forbearing with the South. Actually, the Congressmen from the South felt they had to have "some un to kick," the members of the machine had played the part of "the buffer For fear that the Compromise System should suffer." Unpleasant though their rôle had been, they had made it pay. Their system was one

Where the people found jints an' their frien's  
 done the carvin', --  
 Where the many done all o' their thinkin' by  
 proxy,  
 An' were proud on 't ez long ez 't wuz  
 christened Democ'cy.

But everything was spoiled by the secession of the Southern States.

Now that the Republicans are in power, if they ever begin to interpret the Constitution according to the principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence,

We 'd better take maysures fory shettin' up shop  
 An' put off our stock by a vendoo or swop.

There is still some hope, however. The real Republicans will soon find out that the principles they have adoped are impracticable. They will learn,

as every politician does, that Truth must be kept in the abstract if it is not to hurt some people's interests. Some Republicans believe that general principles can be applied to special cases,

An' there's where we 'll nick 'em, there 's  
 where they 'll be lost:  
 For applyin' your princerple 's wut makes it cost,  
 An' folks don't want Fourth o' July t' interfere  
 With the business-consarns o' the rest o' the year,  
 No more 'n they want Sunday to pry an' to peek  
 Into wut they are doin' the rest o' the week.

A real statesman must guard against having beliefs that are too strong, lest he give expression to them and thus injure his party. Hence this group too must be careful not to air its opinions and proceedings. The Honorable Doe's advice is: "never say nuthin' that you can be held tu."

The South is far from being defeated yet, but "ez Jeff says, the wind-bag 's gut pricked;" it behooves the machine, therefore, to begin making plans for reconstruction. The first thing to do is to save whatever is left of slavery, for an abuse of this kind can be made the source of political profit. Unfortunately, too many Democrats have become strict Union men. Nevertheless there are some encouraging signs, such as the rough handling Wendell Phillips received in Cincinnati when he attempted to lecture on slavery and the war, Nor was the Compromise System failed entirely. The thing to do is to adopt slogans that will win the people. Just as "Disunion" worded before the war, so "Abolition" will be useful for some time yet, and after the war "Forgive-an'-forget" will carry the day for the machine. The machine still has a chance of making money, but just now, the Honorable Doe believes, the thing to do is "to keep dark an' lay low Till we see the right minute to put in our blow."

With that piece of advice he brings his speech to a close and turns to the more pleasant occupation of giving "thet 'ere bottle a skrimmage," for he has talked until he is as "dry ez a real graven image."

#### No. VI

Readers of the Atlantic Monthly must have received a delightful surprise when they picked up the June, 1862, number and read Hosea Biglow's contribution for the month, "Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line." Readers of the Biglow Papers today experience a similar joy, for not only is the Parson's introductory letter much shorter than usual, but the bitter sectionalism and political realism of Hosea's previous contributions have disappeared and given place to the mystic practicality that is one of the outstanding traits of his New England heritage.

The Parson's letter may be dismissed with a single comment. He agrees with Hosea that contemporary political problems cannot be solved by a literal application of Scripture ideas; nevertheless he could wish that the habit which the Jews had of

subordinating the actual to the moral, the flesh to the spirit, and this world to the other, were more common. They had found out, at least, the great military secret that soul weighs more than body.<sup>11</sup>

More than half of Hosea's twelve-page poem is almost purely lyric, the outpouring of his heart's love for the New England countryside in spring.

As the scent of musk clings to a chest, so the ideas that poets

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<sup>11</sup> The quotations in this section are from *ibid.*, 428-432, 434, 437-440.



imbibe in youth cling to them in later years. They write only about things that others have written about before them; they think our "fust o' May is May, Which 't ain't, for all the almanicks can say."

May-day in New England usually finds city-girls searching for a dry place where they can choose their queen. Hosea himself knows "where to find Some blooms that make the season suit the mind," — liverworts and bloodroots, "Spring's pickets," whom the frost will try to drive in;

For half our May 's so awfully like May n't,  
't would rile a Shaker or an evrige saint;  
Though I own up I like our back'ard springs,  
Thet kind o' haggle with their greens an' things,  
An' when you 'most give up, 'thout more words  
Toss the fields full o' blossoms, leaves, an' birds.

The blackbirds come first, politicians who settle things in windy Congresses — most unlike human politicians, for they all "head against the wind." Then the trees begin to blossom — the maple, the willow, the horse-chestnut. The robin "goes to plast' rin his adobe" house. "Now things lag a bit, until "Spring gits everythin' in tune. An' gives one leap from April into June." Trees in fields and wood and orchard burst into bloom, and then at last

. . . June's bridesman, poet o' the year,  
Gladness on wings, the bobolink, is here;  
Half-hid in tip-top apple-blooms he swings,  
Or climbs against the breeze with quiverin' wings,  
Or, givin' way to 't in a mock despair,  
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air.

When spring comes Hosea feels the sap start in his veins, and he must up and away from other people to have a private talk with that queerest, most unsocial creature, Himself.

Such was his feeling last Sabboth. After meeting he slipped away and made for the old schoolhouse where he learned his A B C. Curious creatures

that we are, the present is never just what we want it to be:

Long ez 't wuz futur', 't would be perfect bliss --  
 Soon ez it 's past, thet time 's wuth ten o' this;  
 An' yit there ain't a man thet need be told  
 Thet Now 's the only bird lays eggs o' gold.

The boy dreams of the day when he will be aman; the gray-haired man thinks himself back into the days when he was a boy. So Hosea, when he wants to muse, goes to the old schoolhouse, and there he gets his

. . . boyhood back, an' better things with it, --  
 Faith, Hope, an sunthin', ef it is n't Cherrity  
 It 's want o' guile, and thet 's ez gret a rerrity.

On that particular Sunday afternoon he sat down in his old seat in the schoolhouse and began thinking of all manner of things -- of the war, of hell, of reconstruction, until he finally fell asleep. And as he slept, he dreamed. His dream links this poem with the other papers of the series. Its theme is emancipation.

He hears someone stomping up the step, and looking round, sees a Pilgrim Father, who introduces himself as Hosea's great-great-great-grandfather, a colonel in the Civil War in England. Eager to find out the cause of the American Civil War, he has come to seek information from Hosea, who as a writer would naturally "know a thing or two." But Hosea does not agree with that argument:

't would prove, coz you wear spurs, you kep' a horse:  
 For brains, ... wutever you may think,  
 Ain't boun' to cash the draf's o' pen-an'-ink.

Questioned by Hosea as to the source of his knowledge of contemporary affairs, the old man confesses that he had tried table rapping but had given it up because "mejums lie so like all-split." He wants to know Hosea's opinions

on the outcome of the war. Again Hosea evades the question. A weather vane, he says, is not expected to have an opinion of its own, but it does know "the wind's opinion of a T, An' the wind settles wut the weather 'll be." Indig-  
nantly the old man rejoins that he never thought a scion of "our stock Could  
grow the wood to make a weather-cock;" on the contrary, when he was much younger  
than Hosea, no earthly wind could make him waver.

"Jes' so it wuz with me," says Hosea, "When I wuz younger 'n wut you  
see me now." But age has brought with it indecision, a certain tardiness in  
making up his mind. From the moral point of view the point is always clear  
enough, but when it comes to acting, things are different:

Wut 's best to think may n't puzzle me  
nor you, --

The pinch comes in decidin' wut to du.

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The difference between having a conviction and acting on it is like  
the difference between reading history and making it, between theory and fact:

It 's easy fixin' things in facts an' figgers, --  
They can't resist, nor warn't brought up with niggers;  
But come to try your the 'ry on, -- why, then  
Your facts an' figgers change to ign 'ant men  
Actin' ez ugly"--

The old Puritan will hear no more. He is back in the days of Cromwell  
and again his battle-cry rings out: "Up, Isr'el, to your tents an' grind the  
sword!"

But his Yankee descendant will not be carried away by such eloquence.  
Such a course worked in Judea, but will not work now. It did not even work in  
Cromwell's day: the Puritans got rid of Charles I, only to have Charles II  
come back. Hosea prefers a method that will bring lasting results. Punishment  
is not the only purpose of the war; its prime end is to re-establish the Union

and render it indissoluble:

Now wut I want 's to hev all we gain stick,  
An' not to start Millenium too quick;  
We hain't to punish only, but to keep,  
An' the cure 's gut to go a cent'ry deep.

The Puritan, however, still argues his point. One must take risks at times, he says, and though a Charles II did come to the throne,

Thet exe of ourn, when Charles's neck gut split,  
Opened a gap thet ain't bridged over yit:  
Slav'ry 's your Charles, the Lord hez gin the exe"---

Now it is Hosea's turn to interrupt: "Our Charles ... hez gut eight million necks." The difficulty is not the freeing of the black, who is chained in body only, but the emancipation of the white, whose soul is chained to an idea. Here education must do what force cannot achieve.

Once more the old Puritan pleads his case by means of a figure: A rattlesnake is not dangerous in its tail. The rebellion of the Southern states is only the rattle of the snake; Slavery is the head with poisonous fangs. Crush it, and do it suddenly, if you want to avoid disaster.

Hosea makes one last desperate stand, and in his cry is all the pent-up anguish of a mind faced with a momentous decision:

God's truth! ... an' ef I held the club,  
An' knowed jes' where to strike, -- but there 's  
the rub!

The answer comes, pitiless in its demand, terrifying in its threat:

Strike soon ... or you 'll be deadly ailin', --  
Folks thet 's afeared to fail are sure o' failin';  
God hates your sneakin' creturs thet believe  
He 'll settle things they run away an' leave.

Fiercely the old Puritan stamps his foot. Hosea's dream comes to an end, and with it the sixth paper of the series.

## No. VII

Between January and June, 1862, Hosea had contributed an article to the Atlantic every month. Then eight months elapsed before his seventh article "Latest Views of Mr. Biglow," appeared in the same magazine in February, 1863.

Meanwhile Lowell had killed off Parson Wilbur. Hosea's article was therefore prefaced by an editorial note announcing the death of the eighty-four-year-old divine on Christmas Day, 1862, and giving a brief summary of the communication received from the Reverend Jeduthun Hitchcock, Parson Wilbur's friend and colleague, concerning the life and works of the Parson. Then follows the fragment of a letter addressed by Parson to the editors of the Atlantic Monthly and obviously intended to accompany Hosea's latest contribution.

Dated the day before Parson Wilbur's death, the letter bears witness to his weariness of life in general and of the Civil War in particular. Yet burdensome as the war is he would have it "go on till we are reduced to wooden platters again, rather than surrender the principle to defend which it was undertaken."<sup>12</sup> The principle is the maintenance of the Union, the upholding of the idea of government. Slavery is the cause of the war, but it is not the principle underlying it.

The Parson would add a word too on the subject of compromise, on which Hosea has certain extreme views. Government and law as such, he declares, cannot be made a subject of compromise; yet "without a compromise of individual opinions, interests, and even rights, no society would be possible." Here the

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<sup>12</sup> The quotations in this section are taken from ibid., 447, 448-449, 449, 450, 452, 453.

fragment abruptly ends.

Hosea's poem is an invective against the endless bickering of politicians and a defense of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Since the beginning of the war Democrats had denounced almost every measure adopted by the government to end the rebellion. By the autumn of 1862 Lincoln realized that, despite the opposition of Northern Democrats, he would have to take drastic steps against slavery. In September, therefore, he issued a proclamation that, unless certain conditions were complied with, he would as a war measure emancipate all slaves in the rebelling states on New Year's Day, 1863. The Democrats immediately attacked this proclamation, and for a time threatened to wreck the administration. They carried the elections in several states, but the loyalty of New England, the West, and the Border States provided Lincoln with the majority he needed to carry out his policy.

Hosea, the mouthpiece of New England popular sentiment, has watched the tactics of the Democrats with growing impatience. Now, with his indignation at white heat, he bursts forth with the wish that he could make a flaming song that would turn men's hearts and faces skywards. But words, he reflects, are not the need of the day;

Wut's wanted now 's the silent rhyme  
'Twixt upright Will an' downright Action.

Too long have senators and governors wasted their time in party wranglings; too long has one party publicly tried to break up the other. Let them realize at last that

It 's war we 're in, not politics;  
It 's systems wrastlin' now, not parties;  
An' victory in the eend 'll fix  
Where longest will an' truest heart is.

This is not the time to talk about conciliation, for conciliation would mean that the Union has been defeated. A year ago the Nation stood ready to fight, waiting for the man who would wield the keen sword it had forged. But what has happened since then? There has been talk and more talk, a dragging out of the issue from month to month. Deliberation is well and good when the war cools down, but while it is going on, "the true stuff is pison-mad, pig-headed fightin'." One thing Northerners ought to learn from the states that have seceded: the absolute need of "cast-iron leaders."

The President's proclamation of September 22, 1862, is the one encouraging sign of the times. For Slavery is the "heart an' will" of Secession, and now that it has been drawn "into War's mill, D' ye say them thunder-stones sha' n't grind it?"

As for the people who are denouncing the President's proclamation, let them be comforted in the realization that it will not deprive them of the right to be fools:

It ain't a-goin' to lib'rate us,  
 Ef we don't like emancipation:  
 The right to be a cussed fool  
 Is safe from all devices human,  
 It's common (ez a gin'l rule)  
 To every critter born o' woman.

Hosea does not expect millenium in a day. Plans will miscarry, he knows, for men are men and "ain't made angels in a day, No matter how much you mould an' labor 'em." Theory wants to accomplish things in a hurry, but Fact insists on taking its time.

At any rate, no matter what happens, Lincoln has at last taken a bold an unrelenting stand:

Thet 's wut we want, -- we want to know  
 The folks on our side hez the bravery  
 To b'lieve ez hard, come weal, come woe,  
 In Freedom ez Jeff doos in Slavery.

Put Slavery and Freedom side by side, and no one with faith in God  
 can doubt who will be the victor. Once our people firmly believe in Freedom  
 there will be no need of a proclamation, for the whole world will know that

Earth's Biggest Country 's gut her soul  
 An' risen up Earth's Greatest Nation!

#### No. VIII & IX

Chronologically the eighth and ninth articles of the second series of Biglow Papers are out of place, nor have they any direct connection with Hosea Biglow or the Civil War. The fact is that Lowell added them when he decided to publish the second series in book form. Hence they may be dismissed with a comparatively brief analysis.

In February, 1866, according to the preliminary note of the eighth article, the editors of the Atlantic Monthly received a letter from the Rev. Jeduthun Hitchcock, Parson Wilbur's successor at Jaalam, enclosing some macaronic verses rapped out by the spirit of the deceased parson through the medium of a young man living at the rectory. Written in a language that is neither the Yankee of Hosea nor the polished Latin of which the Parson was a master in life, but a barbarous mixture of both, these verses would undoubtedly be completely ignored by the present-day student of the Biglow Papers were it not for the fact that Frederick D. Smith of the University of North Dakota has prepared an annotated English version of them.<sup>13</sup>



The present write is indebted to Smith's study for the remarks here made.

"Kettelopotomachia," or The Battle of the Kettle and the Pot, as the verses are entitled, owed its origin to a fight that took place in Virginia Capitol in January, 1866. Pollard, Coleman, and Tyler, three Virginians who were disputing about the public printing, met in the capitol to settle the matter with revolvers. Although six shots were fired, no one was injured, but a statue of Washington was damaged.

Lowell seized on the incident as the basis for a skit in which he could indulge his long-standing prejudice against the Virginia aristocracy in a humorous way.

The descent of the First Families of Virginia from rascals and blackguards and from women sold for so many hogsheads of tobacco, their culture as evidenced in such customs as riding the rail and tar and feathering, their cruelty to slaves -- all these are the butt of Lowell's raillery. The skit ends in a brawl between the drunken, tobacco-chewing printers, whose unconscious forms the watchman carries off to the Calaboose.

In an introductory note to the ninth paper, the editors of the Atlantic declare that in response to numerous inquiries about the literary remains of Parson Wilbue, they are printing some extracts from the personal anecdotes and recollections, with specimens of table-talk, that have been submitted to them by the Rev. Jeduthun Hitchcock.

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13 "Mr. Wilbur's Postumous Macaronics," The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota, X, July, 1920, 436-443.

Though all of the quoted passages are examples of the Parson's subtle wit and gentle irony, only two have any reference to the politics of the day. In the first, the Parson informs his colleague that when he reads a debate in Congress he feels as if he were sitting at the feet of Zeno in Greece, since "the only view which honorable members give me of what goes on in the world is through their intercalumniations."<sup>14</sup> Then he adds,

The most punctilious refinement of manners is the only salt that will keep a democracy from stinking; and what are we to expect from the people, if their representatives set them such lessons?<sup>15</sup>

In the second passage the Parson makes a subtle thrust at New England and Virginian pride of birth:

We flatter ourselves in the Pilgrim Fathers, and the Virginian offshoot of a transported convict swells with the fancy of a cavalier ancestry. Pride of birth, I have noticed, takes two forms. One complacently traces himself up to a coronet; another defiantly, to a lapstone. The sentiment is precisely the same in both cases, only that one is the positive and the other the negative pole of it.<sup>16</sup>

#### No. X

It was April, 1865, when Hosea Biglow's next contribution appeared in the Atlantic, a letter in verse entitled "Mr. Hosea Biglow to the Editor of the Atlantic Monthly." For four years the Civil War had been dragging on, and men were yearning for peace. That very month it was to come, and in its wake

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<sup>14</sup> Lowell, Biglow Papers, 472.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 478-479.

the assassination of the Captain who had safely steered the Ship of State into the harbor of Peace. But all of this was still hidden in the unknown future when Lowell sat down and wrote what is perhaps the deepest, the most poignant poem of the second series. His unswerving loyalty to his poetic ideal, his innate love for New England, his own grief and that of others, whose loved ones have fallen in the war, his intense yearning for peace — to all these he gives utterance in Hosea's poem, and in so doing he becomes the voice of a great nation purified and made one by the fires of a mortal conflict. The reader feels that in this poem Hosea has burst the bonds of sectionalism and is now the mouthpiece of America, not of New England only.

In this whimsical way he begins his letter by apologizing to the editor of the Atlantic for not being able perhaps to give him the funny poem he has requested. The fact is, when he sits down to write he never "knows wut 's comin', gall or honey."<sup>17</sup> As for his "citifying" his English, he admits that he can write "long-tailed" if he pleases,

But when I 'm jokin', no, I thankee;  
Then, 'fore I know it, my ideas  
Run helter-skelter into Yankee.

Ever since he took to writing poetry, he has made progress in his schooling, thanks to the Parson's help and influence. Nevertheless he prefers the "unhigschooled" talk of farmers; it is meatier than book-froth;

For puttin' in a downright lick  
'twixt Humbug's eyes, ther' 's few can metch  
it,  
An' then it helves my thoughts ez slick

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<sup>17</sup> The quotations in this section are from ibid., 480-486.

Ez stret-grained hickory doos a hetchet.

But whatever he writes must be the product of inspiration. Forced ideas are worthless; they are like a pig that must be driven. Live thoughts, on the contrary, are like rivers in spring:

... thru all rifts  
 O' sense they pour and resh ye onwards,  
 Like rivers when south-lyin' drifts  
 Feel thet th' old airth 's a wheelin' sunwards.

There was a time when such thoughts came crowding into his mind like "office-seekers arter 'lection," but since the war they keep hanging back as if he "wanted to enlist 'em."

The war has changed all things. His mind is restless with hope and dread. One question endlessly repeats itself: "Where's Peace?" All of his former joys — his walks across the crunching snow on a cold starlit night, the beauty of the rising moon, the sight of innocent babes — these things, which formerly made him gladder than cocks could be of spring or bees of clover, now fill his soul "with thoughts o' battle."

Nature keeps on in her course, calmly, quietly, seeming not to care. But Hosea can no longer hark to the gentle whisperings of snowflakes on the pane when Grant or Sherman is "ollers present." The yellow pines, sweet-scented in the sunshine, the purr of the west wind through their branches, the call of the wild geese "sweet an' low Ez distant bells thet ring for meetin'," — no longer do they move him. The smoke slowly rising from farm-houses seems sad and makes him think of empty places round the hearth.

He hears the beat of drums and thinks

. . . o' the feet  
 Thet follered once an' now are quiet, —  
 White feet ez snowdrops innercent,  
 Thet never knowed the paths o' Satan,  
 Whose comin' step ther' 's ears thet won't,  
 No, not lifelong, leave off awaitin'.

It is no longer Hosea but Lowell himself who is speaking, mourning the death  
 of the three young nephews

Who ventered life an' love an' youth  
 For the gret prize o' death in battle.

What are words to such as these? What are mere words to that favorite nephew  
 of his, Colonel Charles Russell Lowell,

. . . who, deadly hurt agen  
 Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,  
 Tippin' with fire the bolt of men  
 Thet rived the Rebel line asunder?

It seems unfair that youth, with all its hopes and promises, should die, while  
 age tries in vain to take its place.

Sorrow enlarges the poet's heart, and his sympathy embraces even the  
 enemy:

I pity mothers, tu, down South,  
 For all they sot among the scorners.

For one brief instant the thought of the enemy stirs up the old rancor in his  
 heart as he declares that at judgment he would rather stand with the meanest  
 slave

Than at God's bar hol' up a han'  
 Ez drippin' red ez yourn, Jeff Davis!

But even this feeling must give way to the intense longing for peace  
 that fills his own soul and that of all his fellowmen. "Come, Peace!" he  
 cries, not mourning lost honor and wasted lives, but proud in triumph, firmly

gripping the hilt of the sword of victory.

Come, while our country feels the lift  
 Of a gret instinct shoutin' "Forwards!"  
 An' knows thet freedom ain't a gift  
 Thet tarries long in han's o' cowards!  
 Come, sech ez mothers prayed for, when  
 They kissed their cross with lips thet  
       quivered,  
 An bring fair wages for brave men,  
 A nation saved, a race delivered!

#### No. XI

On April 14, 1865, the surrender of Lee at Appomattox Court House brought the Civil War to an end. People joyously looked forward to the blessings of the newera of peace that had begun that day. The nation had been saved; the negro race had been delivered.

But as the months wore on the peace that men had longed for did not come. In its stead came the struggle between the President and Congress that threatened to unto the work of four years of war. Acting onthe advice of Secretary of State Seward, Andrew Johnson, whom Lincoln's death had elevated to the presidency, drew up a plan of reconstruction opposed to the views of Congress and the Republican party. His idea was to restore all the Southern states to the position they had held in 1860, and this without exacting sufficient guarantees of loyalty, particularly regarding the liberty and safety of negroes, all of whom had been freed by the thirteenth amendment in December, 1865.

Once again Lowell determined to give utterance to public opinion, and in May, 1866, "Mr. Hosea Biglow's Speech in March Meeting" appeared in the Atlantic Monthly. This last Biglow paper is a masterpiece of satire, racy

humor, and homely figures. Hosea's theme is reconstruction, but incidentally he makes many a subtle thrust at speakers and journalists.

The death of Parson Wilbur has not only deprived Hosea of someone to draw out his talents but has made it necessary for him to write his own introduction for this last production of his muse. With typical Yankee thrift he begins his letter to the editor of the Atlantic:

My dear Sir, --

(an' noticin' by your kiver thet  
you 're some dearer than wut you wuz,  
I enclose the deffrence)<sup>18</sup>

Then he goes on to lament the "disease" of Parson Wilbur, who "ust to kind o' wine me up an 'set the penderlum agoin, an' then somehow I seemed to go on tick as it wear till I run down." The new minister, unfortunately has not this ability. Hosea also misses the Parson's introductions to his poems, for "[h]e used to interdooce 'em smooth ez ile athout sayin' nothin' in pertickler."

Today a particular problem faces Hosea. He recalls that poems are often preceded by so-called "Argymunce, like poorches afore housen whare you could rest ye a spell whilst you wuz concludin' whether you 'd go in or nut." Though he has never seen such "argimunts" for speeches, he is presenting one for his speech, and since he claims no "paytent" on it, anyone is free to use it.

"The Argymunt" is a rollicking bit of satire on speeches in general and, apparently, on political speeches in particular. After the "[i]nterducshin" which, he tells his readers, "may be skipt," Hosea begins by talking about

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<sup>18</sup> The quotations in this section are from ibid., 487-496, 498-502, 504-509.

himself, a practice that is pleasing to at least one of the company, and then he seeks to win the good will of his "orjunce" by letting them understand that "thet they air about East, A one, an' no mistake." Eventually he reaches the body of his speech, which becomes one long round of subject stated, expanded, restated, diluted, stated "back 'ards, sideways, eendways, criss-cross, bevel-lin'," until he "[f]inely concloods to conclood" and "[y]eels the flore."

He adds a note on liberty in spelling and punctuation, of which he is a strong advocate, since "it kind of puts a noo soot of close onto a word, thisere funnatick spellin' doos an' takes 'em out of the prisen dress they wair in the Dixonary."

A little anecdote from Parson Wilbur on nature in literature throws light on Hosea's manner of writing. Asked by the Parson what was the sweetest smell on earth, Hosea had first suggested new-mown hay and then his little daughter's breath. But the Parson would have none of these.

"Ef you want to know," sez he, "open your winder of a mornin' et ary season, and you 'll larn thet the best of perfooms is jest fresh air . . . athout no mixtur."

That, in the Parson's mind, was nature in writing Hosea confesses that he often thinks of the Parson's words when he begins to write, "but the winders air so ept to git stuck, an' breakin' a pane costs sunthin'."

With that remark, Hosea brings his introductory letter to a close, signing himself

Yourn for the last time,  
Nut to be continooed,  
 Hosea Biglow.

His poem follows.

As long as "the two-legged gab-machine's so plenty, 'nablin' one man



to du the talk o' twenty," Hosea does not think he will ever attain to a place in the House or the Senate. The truth is, he cannot "mannyfactur' wisdom by the yard" and measure off his eloquence as goods is measured off,

The same old pattern runnin' thru an' thru,  
An' nothin' but the customer thet 's new.

The older he grows the harder he finds it to be sure of his opinions, which ultimately are not the product of his own efforts but of all kinds of circumstances. Most people nowadays enter into discussion without any previous thought, whereas Hosea is inclined to think first, for, as he says,

No man need go an' make himself a fool,  
Nor jedgment ain't like mutton, thet can't bear  
Cookin' tu long, nor be took up tu rare.

Hosea has never had a chance to do public speaking, but he has thought of many things that might be said. He recalls Parson Wilbur's telling of how some great orator used to rehearse his speeches to his cabbage-heads, using various methods of appeal according to their "diff'runt ev' riges o' brains." Knowing one's audience, the Parson had declared, was essential for every speaker, because

. . . when all 's come an' past,  
The kebbige-heads 'll cair the day et last;  
Th' ain't ben a meetin' sence the worl' begun  
But they made (raw or biled ones) ten to one.

Hosea himself has always found cabbage-heads a good audience, for they take advice as people do -- to keep it, not to use it, they listen well, and they hold their tongues. That is why he usually keeps some for seed, and when spring comes and his eloquence gets the better of him, they are ready to listen to him in "March-meetin'." This spring he made some extemporaneous remarks to them, and since there were no reporters on hand, he has written them out.

Following the advice that is usually given to reporters to make their audience seem alive in print, Hosea is putting in "th' applauses where they 'd ough to come!"

So far the introduction. The speech begins with an attempt to win the good graces of his audience:

My feller Kebbig-heads, who look so green  
I vow to gracious thet ef I could dreem  
The world of all its hearers but jest you,  
'T would leave 'bout all tha' is wuth talkin' to.

More compliments of a similar nature follow. Then comes an elaborate introduction of spring, and Hosea has at last reached the subject of his speech. From now on, through a maze of restatement, expansion, elaboration, and beating time, the reader can discern a thread of serious, wistful longing for a realization of the ideals that would make America the greatest nation in the world.

Spring is here, says Hosea,  
But thet white dove Carling scared away,  
Five year ago, jes' sech an Aprul day,  
Peace, that we hoped 'ould come an' build last year  
An' coo by every housedoor, is n't here, — no  
Nor wun't never be, for all our jaw,  
Till we 're ez brave in pol'tics ez in war!

If only people could be made to realize the power of an idea, a power ten times greater than that of steel because it pierces your heart without your knowing it. That is the kind of danger the country is facing now.

No one can ever accuse Hosea of saying a "word ag'in the South ez the South," nor is there anyone who would be happier than Hosea to take it back; all he asks is a sufficient guarantee that there will be no second Civil War. Give what the South asks, and the result will be another Jamaica; give what the South needs, "an' we shell git 'fore long A nation all one piece, rich, peaceful,

strong." Make them American, and they will have true love of country; let them stay Southern, "an' you 've kep' a sore Ready to fester ez it done afore."

Indecision is the one thing that will spell ruin for America. The South must be made to accept the negro as the North accepted the Irishman. The only thing that will keep the country safe is "the old Amerikin idee, To make a man a Man an' let him be."

Seward's plan of reconstruction is too weak. He is like the mother of a naughty boy who, despite the complaints of her neighbors, insists on excusing his mean trick.

The President thinks he can treat his Congress "like a nest o' fleas," but the people have made up their mind not to be led blindly, for "These ain't matters thet with pol'tics swings, But goes 'way down amongst the roots o' things." If Johnson thinks he owns this country, if he has made it what it is if he fought the Civil War himself and paid the expenses out of his own pocket, then, says Hosea, "everythin' I exes Is t' hev him come an' pay my ennooal taxes."

Hosea knew that when the war was over it would take time, even a whole generation, to heal the breach between North and South. But he did not think the President would be the one to drive in the wedge that would keep it from closing, for as long as Southerners think that "law an' guv'ment 's only printer's ink," there is no chance of its healing. Johnson has a peculiar idea of state sovereignty: states cannot leave the Union, says he, but if they do they do not lose their sovereignty. To such an argument Hosea replies:

Ef they war' n't out, then why, 'n the name o' sin,  
Make all this row 'bout lettin' of 'em in?

As for depending on Southern pledges of loyalty, Hosea is reminded of the story of the wolves and the sheep. Despite the repeated promises of the wolves to refrain from devouring the sheep, they did so again, until an old shepherd spoke the final word:

"Ez for their oaths they wun't be wuth a button,  
Long 'z you don't cure 'em o' their taste for mutton;  
Th' ain't but one solid way, howe'er you puzzle:  
Tell they 're converted, let 'em wear a muzzle."

Hosea now proceeds to discuss another relevant point. He has noticed that everyone who proposes a new scheme brings letters of endorsement; he has noticed too "it 's the quack me' cines gits (An' needs) the grettest heaps o' stiffykits." He himself has never believed in such endorsements, but he has some letters "from t' other side" which he thinks worthy of consideration.

In the first place the Honorable B. O. Sawin writes that when the war ended he spent sleepless nights trying to determine whether he should pose as an original Union man or not, but now that a year has passed he feels safe in remaining on the side of secession, which has "contrived to doctor th' Union horse" and will therefore surely win. Mr. Sawin encloses an extract from a Northern Democrat that confirms him in his decision.

The four years of the war, the Democrat admits, were hard ones, in which his party could do nothing but wait for the turn of the tide. Since the war is over, however, things are not as they used to be. The people are no longer willing to have politicians be their proxies; indeed, unless they are stopped, "they 'll blunder on . . . to real Democ'cy."

There is one crack in reconstruction, however, that may give the Democrats a chance: the conflict between white and black. Certainly, the

writer of the letter admits, he is willing to recognize all white men as his brethren, but as for negroes,

Wut, is there lef' I 'd like to know,  
Ef 't ain't the defference o' color,  
To keep up self-respec' an' show  
The human natur' of a fullah?  
Wut good in bein' white, onless  
It 's fixed by law, nut lef' to guess  
We 're a heap smarter an' they duller?

This is why he hails Johnson's speech in connection with his veto of the Civil Rights Act of March, 1866. The speech furnishes material for a party platform, and if only the Democrats can hold on until the end of Johnson's term, political success will be theirs. The South will be back in its original place, enjoying the spoils of Freesoilers, just

. . . ez though an ingineer  
Should claim th' old iron for his sheer  
Coz 't himself that bust the biler!

Hosea again takes up the argument. Such political graft will be the result of "tryin' squirtguns on the burnin' Pit," he says. Then will the men who died "To settle, once for all, thet men wuz men," feel that Death, not they had conquered.

Hosea has reached the end of his speech. Nothing remains but his conclusion:

My frien's I've talked nigh on to long enough,  
I hain't no call to bore ye coz ye 're tough;  
My lungs are sound, an' our own 'vice delights  
Our ears, but even kebbige-heads hez rights.  
It 's the las' time thet I shell e'er address ye,  
But you'll soon fin' some new tormentor: bless ye!

And as Hosea speaks his last word, the career of James Russell Lowell as a political satirist comes to an end.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: LI LOWELL'S ACHIEVEMENT AS A POLITICAL SATIRIST

Literary ~~accs~~ achievement, like other things of the spirit, cannot be measured in terms of ~~lef~~ material or even sensible effects. Time and that public opinion which has its roots in the basic principles of morality may bear witness to the permanent value of a book. But while they may, in a measure, indicate the extent of its influence, they cannot explain the exact nature or the causes of its greatness. The personality of an author, his subject and its occasion, his genre, ~~his~~ his style -- that elusive something which makes a commonplace peculiarly his ~~as~~ own: the aggregate of these factors makes a book either lasting or ephemeral. But it is well-nigh impossible to say which of these factors is the determining one.

To say that ~~that~~ James Russell Lowell attained a high level of achievement in the field of political satire is merely to echo what critics from his own day to the present have ~~deb~~ declared in varying degrees of intensity. To analyze that achievement is a more ~~sure~~ difficult problem. Yet it would seem that a fair idea of it may be obtained by ~~very~~ considering what critics have said about the Biglow papers, (on which his ~~ails~~ reputation as a political satirist rests), what Lowell himself thought of ~~tho~~ them, and what they mean to a present-day student of American literature.

It was Charles F. Briggs who pointed the way to greatness in the field

of political satire when he wrote to Lowell, then in the first fervor of his anti-slavery work: "Put all your abolitionism into rhyme, . . . everybody will read it in that shape, and it will do good. Don't forget that you are a poet and go to writing newspaper articles."<sup>1</sup> The event proved the soundness of this advice, for while Lowell's political essays have been relegated to the realm of dry-as-dust research, his Biglow Papers have maintained their freshness of appeal for a century and more. Why this difference?

In the first place, the Biglow Papers are original. For all of his other poems he found a model in "England's Parnassus;"<sup>2</sup> in the Biglow Papers Lowell himself, with all his idiosyncracies, speaks through Hosea and Parson Wilbur and Birdofredum. His learning and his common sense, his love of classic Greek and Latin and of the Yankee dialect, his lofty patriotism and his boyish fondness for quips and puns, his serious idealism and his racy humor -- all these find an adequate outlet in the productions of Hosea's "mews," the lucubrations of the Parson, and the epistles of Birdofredum.

But besides being an expression of Lowell's personality, the Biglow Papers are an epitome of the New England mind and temperament. Van Wyck Brooks has expressed this thought in a passage that deserves quotation:

It was the glory of The Biglow Papers, -- which made the book

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Horace Elisha Scudder, James Russell Lowell, A Biography, Boston, 1901, I, 160.

<sup>2</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865, [no city given], 1936, 318.

almost a folk-creation, — that Parson Wilbur and Hosea Biglow were brothers under their skins. That literate and illiterate New England met on a common ground of feeling, that were at one in essential matters, religious and political alike, that their regard for human rights, their hatred of war and false ideas of empire, sprang from their common principle, — this was the burden of The Biglow Papers. It was the most profound of Lowell's works because of its instinctive presentation of the folk point of view from which it sprang, for Lowell's moment of radical fervour carried him to the depths of the popular mind.

The Biglow Papers remained as a permanent landmark. No other work compared with it, either then or later, for showing the homogeneity of New England, its common stock, its common faith.<sup>3</sup>

William Rose Benét commends the brilliant journalism of the Biglow Papers,<sup>4</sup> and R. H. Stoddard speaks of their rare wit and wisdom.<sup>5</sup> The latter, like Frederick D. Smith,<sup>6</sup> considers Parson Wilbur an even greater creation of Lowell's genius than Hosea Biglow.

Besides commenting on the Biglow Papers in general, a number of critics speak of and compare the two individual series. So Boynton remarks that in the first series "Lowell forgot himself more completely than he was ever to do again, and wrote simply, compactly, concretely, unlearnedly."<sup>7</sup> Ferris Greenslet, who has written two intensive studies of Lowell, speaks of the first

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3 Ibid., 320.

4 "Lowell, and Liberty," Saturday Review of Literature, XXV, De. 12, 1942, 20.

5 "James Russell Lowell," North American Review, CIII, 466.

6 "Mr. Wilbur's Postumous Macaronics," Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota, X, July, 1920, 436.

7 P. H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, New York, 1936, 554.



series in terms of its political effect and its popularity. Though it prevented neither the Mexican War nor the abuses that followed that war, "it did help notably in unifying public opinion at the North, and in making things exceedingly uncomfortable for the men for whom discomfort was righteous."<sup>8</sup> Passages from the poems of this series have appeared in the press again and again during great national crises, and "more phrases from it . . . have passed into popular speech than perhaps from any other poem or group of poems in the history of our literature."<sup>9</sup>

A number of critics find the second series inferior to the first. One brings forward the simplicity and crispness of the latter in comparison with the length and smothering addenda of the former.<sup>10</sup> Another thinks that the second series, "if not inferior in skill, somehow lacks the entire sufficiency . . . of the first," and he alleges as a reason for this defect the inadequacy of Hosea's dialect for expressing the overpowering passions aroused by the Civil War.<sup>11</sup> A third believes that the great defect of the second series is its bitter partisanship. While Lowell makes some incisive criticisms of England, they are not bitter or unjust; his satire of the South, however, is definitely more bitter than incisive.<sup>12</sup>

But staunch defenders of the second series are not wanting. So H. D.

8 James Russell Lowell, Boston, 1905, 85.

9 Ibid., 86.

10 Boynton, Literature and American Life, 555.

11 Ashley H. Thorndike, "Lowell," The Cambridge History of American Literature, New York, 1933, II, 251-252.

12 W. C. Brownell, American Prose Masters, New York, 1909, 333.

Trall declares that despite the alleged inferiority of this series to the first, "it would be hard to find any better ground for this opinion than the particular fact that it was a second series, and the general truth that seconds are not firsts."<sup>13</sup> Charles Eliot Norton, Lowell's friend and the editor of his letters, holds that during the Civil War "his writings were among the most powerful and effective expressions of the sentiment and opinion of the North," and that "[f]ew poets have ever rendered such service to their country as Lowell rendered in these years."<sup>14</sup> Greenslet corroborates this opinion, adding that the second series is "weightier and far more moving than the first."<sup>15</sup> The great moral issue of the Civil War, the fact that it began with a definite act of aggression on the part of the South, and, above all, Lowell's experience of personal loss are, according to Greenslet, the reasons for the superiority of the second series.<sup>16</sup>

So far the critics of Lowell. The poet has left his own criticism of the Biglow Papers, a criticism that is the more valuable in that it was written with the candor and abandon characteristic of familiar letters never intended for publication.

On September 13, 1859, approximately ten years after the publication of the first series, Lowell wrote to Thomas Hughes, who wishes to publish an English edition of the Biglow Papers:

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13 "Mr. J. R. Lowell," Fortnightly Review, XXXVIII, 1885, 86.

14 Letters of James Russell Lowell, New York, 1893, I, 267.

15 Ferris Greenslet, The Lowells and Their Seven Worlds, Boston, 1946, 271.

16 Ibid., 304. Cf. also Greenslet, Lowell, 157-158.

It has been a particular satisfaction to me to hear, now and then, some friendly voice from the old mother-island say "Well done," of the "Biglow Papers," for, to say the truth, I like them myself, and when I was reading them over for a new edition, a year or two ago, could not help laughing. But then as I laughed I found myself asking, "Are these yours? How did you make them?" Friendly people say to me sometimes, "Write us more 'Biglow Papers,'" and I have even been simple enough to try, only to find that I could not. This has helped to persuade me that the book was a genuine growth and not a manufacture, and that, therefore, I had an honest right to be pleased without blushing if people like it. . . . I confess that I am proud of the recognition the book has received in England, because it seems to prove that, despite its intense provincialism, there is a general truth to human nature in it which justifies its having been written.<sup>17</sup>

A similar thought occurs in a note to Miss Norton, written on October 14, 1870. Lowell speaks of a delightful visit from Hughes, who is constantly quoting from the Biglow Papers and who knows them better than their author does. "I was astonished," Lowell concludes, "to find what a heap of wisdom was accumulated in those admirable volumes."<sup>18</sup>

As for the comparative merits of the two series, Lowell definitely takes his stand on the side of the second series. In a note to a lady who wanted a complete list of his works, he speaks of the second edition series as "in my opinion the best."<sup>19</sup> And in January, 1887, he writes to Thomas Hughes about a critic of his in the Cornhill Magazine:

He is wrong about the second part of the "Biglow Papers." I think had he read these first, he would have seen they had more permanent qualities than their predecessors, less fun and more humor perhaps.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Letters, I, 295, 297.

18 Ibid., II, 64.

19 Ibid., II, 138.

20 Ibid., 331.

But whatever the opinions of critic and of Lowell himself, they can neither make nor unmake the instinctive judgment which an unbiased reader of 1950 passes on the Biglow Papers. They can, it is true, influence that judgment inasmuch as they point out good and bad qualities, but ultimately his opinion will be based on what he himself finds in these political satires.

The long-winded, egoistic lucubrations of Parson Wilbur in his introductions and conclusions create a sense of weariness that the reader does not easily overcome. If he is familiar with the classics, the Parson's scraps of Latin often bring a twinkle to his eye; if he is not, he vainly wishes that the good divine had kept his classical references for other ears. Yet even in the Parson's contributions he finds meaty passages. So, for instance, he cannot help pondering the tremendous moral truth which the Parson expresses almost incidentally in his long introduction to Hosea's "Mason and Slidell: A Yankee Idyll":

There are three short and simple words, the hardest of all to pronounce in any language (and I suspect they were no easier before the confusion of tongues), but which no man or nation that cannot utter can claim to have arrived at manhood. Those words are, I was wrong; and I am proud that, while England played the boy, our rulers had strength enough from the People below and wisdom enough from God above to quit themselves like men.<sup>21</sup>

But it is Hosea's dialect verse that brings a sparkle to the reader's eye and a smile to his lips. True, the passages that bring him joy are not sustained flights of poetic power but rather flashes of wit and humor and lyricism. He will search long before he finds anything to rival the limpid lines in which

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<sup>21</sup> James Russell Lowell, The Biglow Papers, 5th edition, Boston, 1890, 326.

Hosea speaks of June's bridesman," the bobolink, who

. . . climbs against the breeze with quiverin' wings,  
Or, givin' way to 't in a mock despair,  
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air.<sup>22</sup>

Living in a world whose youth has been mown down by two World Wars, he feels the poignancy of the Yankee farmer's lines on the youthful victims of the Civil War.<sup>23</sup> And Hosea's invocation to Peace takes on a new meaning for him as he contemplates the possibility of a third World War.<sup>24</sup>

Other lighter, but no less modern, aspects of the Biglow Papers also impress him. As he surveys the turmoil of European politics during the last three decades, he appreciates the fundamental truth of the whimsical comment on changing governments that Hosea puts into the mouth of Bunker Hill Monument:

. . . build sure in the beginnin',  
An' then don't never tech the underpinnin':  
Th' older a guv' ment is, the better 't suits;  
New ones hunt folks's corns out like new boots:  
Change jes' for change, is like them big hotels  
Where they shift plates, an' let ye live on smells.<sup>25</sup>

Again, Hosea's analysis of theory and fact brings to his mind the United Nations with its idealistic but frustrated plans:

. . . Th'ry is jes' like a train on the rail,  
Thet, weather or no, puts her thru without fail,  
While Fac 's the ole stage thet gits sloughed in the ruts,  
An' hez to allow for your darned efs an' buts,  
An' so, nut intendin' no pers'nal reflections,  
They don't — don't nut allus, thet is, — make  
connections:

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22 Ibid., 432.

23 Ibid., 484-485.

24 Ibid., 485-486.

25 Ibid., 349-350.

Sometimes, when it really doos seem that they'd  
 oughter  
 Combine jest ez sot in their ways ez a bagnet,  
 Ez otherwise-minded ez th' eends of a magnet,  
 An' folks like you 'n me thet ain't ept to be sold,  
 Git somehow or 'nother left out in the cold.<sup>26</sup>

His final reaction to the Biglow Papers is a sense of exultation in his American heritage, that heritage that distinguishes the true American from every other person in the world. He realizes that these verses and their prose background are propaganda, but he is conscious, too, that here is propaganda that will never be outmoded so long as the American nation exists. For whether the Parson is philosophizing about the morality of war; whether Birdofredum is complaining of his lot in Saltillo, or boasting of his newly acquired prestige in the South; or whether Hosea is denouncing the imperialism of the Mexican War, exposing the sham methods of politicians, pleading for a united Northern front during the Civil War, or haranguing his cabbage heads on reconstruction — the reader feels that Lowell himself is speaking through the mouth of each of his characters, pleading with his countrymen to preserve intact that principle of freedom and equality which gave birth to our democracy.

This, then, in the last analysis, is Lowell's achievement as a political satirist: though he wrote his satires for specific occasions, he has bequeathed to posterity an enduring expression of America's love of liberty and hatred of tyranny. The Biglow Papers are the concrete fulfillment of his own words: "I am the poet of the American Idea and I shall be popular by and by."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 414-415.

<sup>27</sup> Letters, I, 148.

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## APPENDIX I

### AN ANNOTATED LIST OF THE EARLY POLITICAL ESSAYS OF

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

"The Abolitionists and Emancipation," The National Anti-Slavery Standard, March 1, 1849. Reprinted in The Anti-Slavery Papers of James Russell Lowell, Boston, II, 51-57. Far from retarding emancipation, as they have been charged with doing, the abolitionists have actually bettered the condition of slaves by making the evil and cruelty of slavery conspicuous and by even winning sympathy in some of the slave states.

"Another Word on Mr. Webster's Speech," Standard, April 4, 1850. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 195-196. Webster's assertion that Aristotle defended slavery is inaccurate. Aristotle was merely summing up what might be said on the side of slavery; he was not stating or defending opinions of his own.

"Anti-Slavery Criticism Upon Mr. Clay's Letter," Standard, April 26, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 80-89. Mr. Greeley's criticism of Abolitionists for finding fault with Mr. Clay's plan for emancipation in Kentucky is illogical and unethical.

"The Attitude of the Religious Press," Standard, October 5, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 158-165. Lowell comments on several articles on slavery that appeared in the "Christian Observer," a religious newspaper published in Philadelphia.

"The Buffalo Convention," Standard, August 10, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 123-127. No matter who becomes the nominee for the presidency at the "Free Soil" Convention in Buffalo, one thing is certain: this newly formed party, by breaking up the old Whig and Democrat parties, is furthering the cause of abolition.

"Mr. Calhoun's Report," Standard, February 15, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 33-42. Mr. Calhoun's report on slavery ought to redouble the fervent efforts of anti-slavery Congressmen to bring about the emancipation of slaves in the District of Columbia. Once this step is taken, slavery will soon be a thing of the past.

"California," Standard, November 29, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 150-155. Though California has asked to be admitted as a free state, one cannot boast of an anti-slavery victory, for Calhoun will probably manage to have the territory divided into half slave and half free states. Slavery is not a mere political issue; it is primarily and should be treated as such -- a moral issue.

"Calling Things by Their Right Names," Standard, November 9, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 184-193. Using the theme of a hermit who leaves his cell and goes to the Cannibal Islands to convert the man-eaters and there in the course of time becomes accustomed to their atrocity and no longer sees anything to reform, Lowell cleverly portrays the course of slavery.

"Canada," Standard, November 1, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 142-149. Relations between Canada and England seem to indicate that the former will be separated from the mother country. In that event, if Canada should ask for annexation to the U.S., as is highly probable, "we shall have an opportunity of learning whether the Constitution is capable of becoming pliable under the hands of Freedom," as it has constantly been under those of Slavery.

"The Church and Clergy," The Pennsylvania Freeman, February 27, 1845. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 23-28. The political and religious principles of a nation must, in order to have any useful vitality, be in advance of that nation's civilization. If religion is a mere political institution, then its sentiment will carry over into larger spheres. Then the Church having deviated from its first principles needs a reform.

"The Church and Clergy Again," The Pennsylvania Freeman, March 27, 1845. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, 29-34. If the Church is what it claims to be, of divine origin, then it ought to be the guardian of truth and not the mouthpiece of politicians; its ministers, if mere politicians, should resign and hand over their sacred position to those who are capable of maintaining religion in its pristine beauty. (Protestant religion).

"The Conquerors of the New World and Their Bondsmen," The National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 12, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 166-175. 1442 marks the date of the first slaves brought from Africa. Gradually the trade became a selfish enterprise with the most disastrous results both to the enslaver and his victim, demoralizing the one and destroying the other.

"Compromise," Standard, March 7, 1850. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 171-176. If the Union is to be preserved, let us have done with Compromise, which since the forming of the Constitution has been some betrayal of good. Let Northerners insist on the Wilmôt Proviso, a true compromise, and remember that there is "something stronger than Compromise, and that is Justice."

"The Conquerors of the New World and Their Bondsmen," Second Notice, Standard, October 26, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 176-183. If Columbus could have foreseen the slave-trade he made possible by his new route, he never would have carried out his plans. He was blinded by the thought of the glory and the gold he would receive when his mission was completed. In like manner men still do almost anything for money. The only attempt ever made up to the present time (Clay's and Calhoun's) was made by a Catholic priest, Father Antonio.

"The Course of the Whigs," Standard, January 11, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 3-9. The attitude of the Whigs since the election of Taylor indicates that they have used anti-slavery sentiment for their own purpose and are now ready to throw it aside. In so doing, they have overreached themselves. The party is doomed.

"Criticism and Abuse," Standard, September 20, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 126-133. Lowell comments on the ridiculous assertions made in Elwood Fisher's pamphlet on slavery and had the review of this pamphlet in the Southern Quarterly Review of July, 1849.

"Daniel Webster," Standard, July 2, 1846. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 35-43. The saddest sight this world has to offer is that of great faculties debased from their legitimate functions, and frittered away in the base uses of the world. Webster is the man who caused this comment.

"Ethnology," Standard, February 1, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 25-32. A study of ethnology has led to the conclusion "that the differences in type exhibited by different races of men is not greater than may be found existing in individuals of the same race subjected for a long period of time to the action of climatic or other physical causes." Hence the absurdity of the nationalism which boasts of racial pre-eminence.

"Exciting Intelligence from South Carolina," Standard, September 7, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 143-150. South Carolina and its three spokesmen -- Butler, Burt, and Calhoun -- become the butt of Lowell's satire as he tears to pieces the threat of this self-opinionated state to dissolve the Union and thus deprive the North of its absolutely essential support.

"Fanaticism in the Navy," Standard, August 31, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 135-142. Lowell writes as a satiric comment on a letter from a naval official, a Southern gentleman, who lauds the efficiency of the leaders of the newly formed Negro republic of Liberia, Africa.

"Fourth of July in Charleston," Standard, July 26, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 112-118. The Fourth-of-July oration in defense of slavery, as well as several toasts offered at the South Carolina celebration indicates the ridiculous vanity and bombast of that state. (As if that state could stand without the Union!)

"The French Revolution of 1848," Standard, April 13, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 44-51. A nation can be loyal to a man, or to the representative of an idea -- (some leaders are neither). Louis Philippe was neither in France. America follows, not a dead, but a living God, therefore she needs no other source of trust and security.

"General Bem's Conversion," Standard, December 6, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 156-157. General Bem's assumption of Mahometanism is the result of his own treatment and that of his countrymen by Christians.

The ghost of murdered Poland drew him to the Turkish camp, thence to wreak vengeance on Christian nations.

"General Taylor," Standard, March 15, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 58-64. The inauguration of General Taylor, though a Whig, portends no good for the anti-slavery movement, for one slave-holder has taken the place of another in the presidential chair. Since the Whig party has taken the first downward step, by the nominating and electing a slave-holder, no anti-slavery measures can be expected from it.

"An Imaginary Conversation," Standard, May 25, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 68-84. Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Foote, and General Cass discuss the recent kidnapping of slaves in the District of Columbia. They decry the assault made on Southern "property," point to the dangerous sentiments which Jefferson introduced into the Declaration of Independence, consider some of the pros and cons for dissolution of the Union. Mr. Calhoun brings the conversation to a conclusion by remarking that "John P. Hale's acknowledgment, that he thought the act of the three kidnappers now in jail a wrong one, gained us vastly more than we could lose by any amount of angry declamation."

"Irish and American Patriots," Standard, November 30, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 202-208. Just as John Bull is trying to keep Ireland in subjection, so America is trying to keep the negro under its heel. Ireland's condition, with regard to food, may be worse than the slaves', but no atrocity can measure up to the deprivation of personal freedom. Tyranny of former years grows pale in the glare of the crime of slavery.

"The Irish Rebekktion," Standard, August 24, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 128-134. Instead of subscribing funds to the insurrection in Ireland, friends of Ireland would be wiser if they raised subscriptions to spread right ideas there and elsewhere.

"Mobs," Standard, June 14, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 98-104. The recent riot in New York, centering about the unpopular English actor Macready and resulting in the deaths of twenty-one persons, is but the natural offspring of the monster set at work in 1834 with general applause to put down the abolitionists.

"Moderation," Standard, August 9, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 119-125. The moderation regarding slavery that is preached by Dr. Peabody of Boston in the July number of the Christian Examiner is nothing but a mediocrity that would do away with such things as positive Right and positive Wrong. If a reform is to be effected, the reformers must have a certain fervent zeal and enthusiasm.

"The Moral Movement against Slavery," Standard, February 22, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 43-50. The result of the Free Soil agitation against slavery shows the need of a purely moral anti-slavery organization;

for while the enthusiasms of a political party necessarily ebb after an unsuccessful election contest, a purely ethical idea can never be defeated.

"Mr. Clay as an Abolitionist -- Second Appearance in Fifty Years," Standard, March 22, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 65-73. Clay's letter on emancipation in Kentucky, in which he poses as an abolitionist, but takes the question of slavery out of the realm of ethics and puts it into that of politics, is, even for the Napoleon of Compromise, compromise outcompromise.

"Mr. Webster's Speech," Standard, March 21, 1850. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 177-194. Mr. Webster's speech on slavery is the work of a traitor to his people. It is an argument against the application to the Wilmot Proviso to New Mexico and California. It is full of fallacies, and though it may not be answered in the Senate, it will be answered by every generous instinct of the human heart.

"The News from Paris," Standard, July 20, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 116-122. Recent events in Paris prove the need of a thorough study of social justice and an application of it to the French people, lest starvation again unite with slaughter and bring about another insurrection. "A permanent truce was never written in blood. It is in those crimson characters that men inscribe the hope of vengeance and the memory of wrong."

"The Nominations for the Presidency," Standard, June 22, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 93-99. Propaganda sways the mass. Taylor has so many good qualities that the reading of them remind one of the epitaph or an obituary -- of course, it is near election time. Democrats have left out the "not" from the eighth commandment. Might is right.

"Our Southern Brethren," Standard, January 18, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 10-16. When Northern members of Congress reach Washington, they promptly forget the laboring classes of the North and bestow their sympathy on "our Southern brethren," the slaveholders. What about the three million Southern laborers who also bear the image of the Almighty Father and who have fallen among thieves?

"The Prejudice of Color," The Pennsylvania Freeman, February 13, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 16-22. When the moral vision of a man becomes perverted enough to persuade him that he is superior to his fellow, he is in reality looking up at him from an immeasurable distance beneath. Though democrats cling to the ocean of equality with the desperation of a drowning man, it is difficult to understand their prejudice of color, as if color made a difference.

"The Presidential Candidates," Standard, May 11, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 60-67. The presidential candidates are noticeably silent -- people don't know their platform and have to vote for a man -- regardless of that for which he stands. Where does the trouble lie? Could it be a lack of the knowledge of writing or do they wish to hide their true motives?

"The President's Message," Standard, December 14, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 209-215. Those who run for president ought to be taught to make speeches and to write documents. Polk hopeless of renomination takes his first installment of revenge in a message nearly as long as a shilling novel, and even more worthy to rank as original fiction. His farewell message is a farce. He lists the extension of territory, mile by mile, then acre by acre, but he fails to say that every acre must be tilled by slaves.

"Politics and the Pulpit," Standard, January 25, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 17-24. Since Christianity "Possesses within itself a principle of development which renders it a test for the church, the state and the individual in every possible phase of society," politics in the sense of devotion to principle has a place in the pulpit.

"Pro-Slavery Logic," Standard, November 23, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 194-201. It has been said that men do not profit by the past — Europe did not prosper under slavery — neither will America. Eloquent political orators hold that the condition of slavery will improve in exact proportion as the institution of slavery is diffused over a larger surface. The condition of a slave can never be improved. There is no way in which injustice can fortify itself long. Not only are there enemies within the citadel, but its own improvidence will sooner or later starve it out.

"Pseudo-Conservatism," Standard, November 13, 1850. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 197-203. The conservatism advocated by Webster, the conservatism that makes us regard as sacred the Fugitive Slave Law simply because it is a law, is only a pseudo-conservatism. If America continues in it, it will cause her ruin. "The true Conservative is he who strives to form some just augury of the Inevitable and to make ready for its coming, who does all in his power to give affairs such a direction that the future may enter as a Fulfiller and not as an Avenger."

"Public Opinion," Standard, May 10, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 90-97. Though moral causes noiselessly and naturally brought about the abolition of villeinage in England, the only safe argument that can be drawn from this fact is that slavery must be abolished in one way or another. One of the great "natural causes" that was lacking in the days of villeinage is now effectively working against slavery; namely, the newspaper.

"Putting the Cart before the Horse," Standard, October 4, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 134-141. Abolitionists do not think they have a panacea. They see one particular social evil and are working to eradicate it. Let those who see other social evils do the same.

"The Roman Republic," Standard, July 12, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 105-111. The lack of sympathy in America toward the revolutionaries of Rome is due to slavery, "which has benumbed the heart of the American people." "...it is impossible for us to be allies of the oppressed and the oppressors at the same time, so we judiciously present our compliments

to the strongest."

"The Sacred Parasol," Standard, June 8, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 85-92. Lowell decries the subterranean methods of American political thought. The Constitution, he points out, is being used to shut out the light of the sun of freedom, which rose in the Declaration of Independence but which, politicians fear, may darken the complexion of the Goddess of Liberty if she is allowed to walk under its full rays.

"Shall We Ever Be Republican?" Standard, April 20, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 52-59. The balances of commonwealths can only be kept even by throwing the dust of them into the eyes of the masses. It is strange that the American people attach so much importance to a presidential election. They seem to forget that governments are intended solely for the advantage of the many. We are not a free people -- slavery has gone from usurpation to usurpation. She has taught us to cringe and palter and equivocate. The two parties are equally corrupt. They would vote for the devil -- provide he were a slave-holder. We are no longer trying to be a free people. We have been too much concerned about what Europe thinks of us and too little of what God thinks. Slavery is our besetting sin.

"Slaveholding Territories," Standard, April 19, 1849. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 74-79. Slavery is not only a moral evil; it is also a physical, a natural evil, for it extracts from the earth the properties which render it capable of supporting life, thus reducing arable land to a veritable desert.

"The South as King Log," Standard, February 21, 1850. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 164-170. The Southern threat of Dissolution of the Union is a veritable King Log, that upon investigation, will be found to be pure Humbug. Let not this threat prevent Northerners from insisting on the terms of the Wilmot Proviso regarding the territory of New Mexico.

"Sympathy with Ireland," Standard, June 29, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 100-107. The claims of the Irish can be compared with certain claims of the Americans. Can we throw the first stone at England for having suppressed the Irish? What are we doing to some of our people (slaves)? If rebellion is encouraged in Ireland, should we not encourage a stronger rebellion in our slaves? One nation may oppress the white race, and the other a black one, but tyranny is of one complexion all over the world.

"Texas," The Pennsylvania Freeman, January 30, 1845. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 8-15. If the advocates of slavery succeed in obtaining the annexation of Texas, slavery will be the weaker for this seeming triumph, for every success of wrong is a step toward its annihilation.

"Turncoats," Standard, September 14, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 151-157. Since Van Buren's nomination by the Free Soil Party, many

Northerners, who at first lauded him because he was gaining the support of Democrats, have become turncoats now that he is attracting Whig votes and are blaming him for his former pro-slavery attitude.

"Turkish Tyranny and America," Standard, December 13, 1849. Reprint in Anti-Slavery Papers, II, 158-163. American indignation at the tyranny of the Sultan in not only refusing to surrender Russian fugitives to the Czar but in forcing them to be his "guests for life" is absurd; the same thing is happening every week in America regarding the fugitive slaves and all colored people in the free states, against whom every avenue to social and political distinction is shut fast.

"A Washington Monument," Standard, December 28, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 216-223. Whatever man or event needs a pile of stones for memory does not deserve one. Let us build the lasting monuments -- let on build an asylum for discharged convicts, let another raise the colored citizen to equality, let a third liberate the slaves.

"What Will Mr. Webster Do?" Standard, July 13, 1848. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 108-115. Now ~~that~~ Taylor and Cass have been nominated for the presidency by the Whigs and Democrats, will Webster use this chance to become a great man by becoming the leader of the indignant people, who are fast awakening to great principles?

"A Word in Season," The Pennsylvania Freeman, January 16, 1845. Reprinted in Anti-Slavery Papers, I, 3-7. If abolitionism is to attain ultimate victory it must never descend from principles to politics.



## APPENDIX II

### AN ANNOTATED LIST OF THE LATER POLITICAL ESSAYS OF

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

"Abraham Lincoln," North American Review, 1864-1865. Reprinted in Political Essays, 177-209. Lincoln came into office at a time when the nation was at its lowest ebb in politics, finances, resources, officers. He converted it to the heroic energy, persistency, and self-reliance of a nation proving that it knows how much dearer greatness is than mere power. Never did a President enter upon an office with less at his command, outside his own strength of heart and steadiness of understanding, for inspiring confidence in the people and so winning it for himself, than Lincoln. Never was ruler so absolute as he, nor so little conscious of it; for he was the incarnate common-sense of the people.

"The American Tract Society," North American Review, 1858. Reprinted in Political Essays, 1-16. Society is blinded by its own will. If the tract must be agreed upon by all Evangelical Christians then why not make the abolition of slavery a tract? The society must either deny the fact that an African has a soul to save or he must consent to the mockery that his way of life is to be found in a book he may not read. (No slave was allowed to receive any education whatsoever.) There is no right of sanctuary for a crime against humanity, and they who drag an unclean thing to the horns of the altar bring it to vengeance, and not to safety.

"The Election in November," Atlantic Monthly, October, 1860. Reprinted in Political Essays, 17-44. Voting is a grave responsibility. Nothing can absolve us from doing our best. If expediency is to be practiced in voting, it must be done in favor of the nation and not in favor of the individual. This November election turns on the one question -- Slavery? Mr. Lincoln is the man who views the situation fairly and squarely, therefore--

"E Pluribus Unum," Atlantic Monthly, February, 1861. Reprinted in Political Essays, 45-74. The U.S. are a unitary and indivisible nation, with national life to protect, a national power to maintain, and national rights to defend against any and every assailant, at all hazards. Slavery is splitting the union. The government should step in and do its duty. Rebellion smells sweeter because it is called Secession, nor does Order lose its divine precedence in human affairs because a knave may nickname it Coercion. Secession means Chaos, and Coercion the exercise of legitimate authority.

"General McClellan's Report," North American Review, 1864. Reprinted

in Political Essays, 92-117. A small army with a capable leader is of much greater value than a large army without a good leader. Our army needs one man. McClellan is not the man. He is an accomplished soldier, but lacks that down-right common-sense which is only another name for genius with its coat off for actual work in hand.

"McClellan or Lincoln," originally called "The Next General Election," North American Review, July, 1864. Reprinted in Political Essays, 153-176. A time for no compromise. There must be a victory -- right over wrong. McClellan stood for compromise and conciliation. Lincoln does not. He is the exponent of principles vital to our peace, dignity, and renown -- of all that could save America from becoming a Mexico, and insure popular freedom for centuries to come.

"The Picken's and Stealin's Rebellion," Atlantic Monthly, June, 1861. Reprinted in Political Essays, 75-91. Nobody is sure of the results of the war, but everybody knows some radical change in the system of African slavery will be brought about. Whether it be doomed to sudden extinction through economical causes, this war will not leave it where it was before. Whatever other result this war is destined to produce, it has already won for us a blessing worth everything to us as a nation in emancipating the public opinion of the North.

"The President on the Stump," North American Review, April, 1866. Reprinted in Political Essays, 264-282. A president must rise above sectionalism. If Johnson wishes to succeed, he must embrace the United States as a whole. The war was fought primarily to establish equality and do away with the narrowness of sectional distinction.

"The Rebellion: Its Causes and Consequences," North American Review, July, 1864. Reprinted in Political Essays, 118-152. The majority always governs in the long run, because it comes gradually round to the side of what is just and for the common interest, and the only dangerous majority is that a mob unchecked by the delay for reflection which all constitutional government interposes. The struggle is between right and privilege, between law and licence. If we secure freedom it will make us a nation alive from sea to sea with the consciousness of a great purpose and a noble destiny, and uniting us as slavery has hitherto combined and made powerful the most hateful aristocracy known to man.

"Reconstruction," North American Review, April, 1865. Reprinted in Political Essays, 210-238. Regenerations must be sought in the South. A people that has shown so much courage and constancy in a bad cause, because they believed it to be a good one, is worth winning even by the sacrifice of our natural feeling of resentment. The negro must be taught how to use his freedom.

"Scotch the Snake, or Kill it?" North American Review, 1866. Reprinted in Political Essays, 239-263. Unless the slave is guided in the use of his new freedom we shall face a situation that will cancel the emancipation act.

"The Seward-Johnson Reaction," North American Review, October, 1866.

Reprinted in Political Essays, 283-327. When important men like Johnson and his partner make mistakes, the whole nation suffers. Personal character and politics should not be mixed as they are inextricably here. Johnson has betrayed the trust to which he was elected.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister De Lourdes, S.C.C. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

August 6, 1951  
Date

James J. Young  
Signature of Adviser



## LIFE

Charles J. Cagney, S.J. was born at Chicago, Illinois June 15, 1925.

He graduated from Our Lady of Sorrows Parochial School Chicago, in 1939 and entered Campion High School, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin in the same year. Upon graduation in 1943, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Milford, Ohio and was enrolled in the College of Arts of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. In September of 1947 he transferred to West Baden College of Loyola University, from which he received the Bachelor of Arts degree in the following June. He immediately entered the graduate school of the same University to pursue his studies for the degree of Master of Arts.

"Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of hearts."

Hamlet

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The perennial popularity of the Shakespearean Tragedy of Hamlet among all ranks of society has again been confirmed and strengthened. The large and heterogeneous crowds that attended Laurence Olivier's screen production of Hamlet proves that Hamlet appeals just as strongly to people today as it did to the Elizabethan audience over three hundred years ago.

Rivalling its popularity, however, is the amount of literature that has attempted to explain the causes for this popularity. In all English literature there is perhaps no other topic that has been the subject of so many theories by so many critics. Hundreds of books have been written about Hamlet, and new ones are being published every year.

In spite of this abundance of material no theory has appeared that solves the problems presented by this modern sphinx to the satisfaction of the people. Modern critics, like Bradley and Quiller-Couch, have sifted the different explanations of past commentators and added their own original ideas.

They have offered interesting and important new aspects to the question, but even their interpretations still seem incomplete and imperfect.

The question that naturally arises in a person's mind is why is it that no explanation fully satisfies all. Dr. H. Ulrici has given the best answer, perhaps, to this riddle:

Since the genuine drama must reflect universal history "in concreto," and contain its whole treasury of thoughts, tendencies, and motives, it is evident that there may be manifold ways of viewing it, even though one only can be the true central and culmination point, of which all the rest are but secondary radiations. This remark is singularly confirmed by the tragedy of "Hamlet." If, in all Shakespeare's pieces, it is necessary to dig deep before we can reach to the lowest foundation on which the dramatic edifice is raised, this is the case especially in the present one. Every fresh commentator who studies and writes about "Hamlet," goes deeper and further than his predecessors, and thinks he has reached to the true foundation, which, nevertheless, lies all the while still deeper and far beyond his researches.<sup>1</sup>

The popularity of Hamlet depends upon a combination of many points, but its fundamental reason lies too deeply implanted in the human heart for any critical genius to be able to analyse it. Nor is it intended in this thesis to solve the problem. The hope of the present writer is simply to throw a different and more penetrating light upon a particular aspect of Hamlet's character.

A person's environment plus his religious training and beliefs have an important influence upon the moulding of his character. The critics in their analysis of Hamlet's character have strangely shied away from mentioning this important factor. This work shall attempt to correct this defect, for it seems that much of the richness and aesthetic beauty of the drama depends upon it.

Throughout the drama, the nexus between the character of Hamlet and his actions are closely interwoven. It is extremely difficult to treat of one separated from the other. Hamlet's greatest struggles are within himself. His melancholy, procrastination, and frustration seem to be a result of his sharp mental struggles. In order to understand these interior struggles, a person must first clearly understand the principles and ideals that guided Hamlet's life. According to the position that will be defended in this thesis, the struggles have arisen from the destruction by his mother of certain ideals regarding womanhood. A close examination of the tragedy reveals that his mother's sinfulness weighs more heavily on his mind than his father's murder.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, will be to reveal the ideals of Hamlet touching womanhood. From a proper understanding of these ideals a deeper sympathy for Hamlet will be aroused when his mother shatters them as quickly and care-

lessly as one shatters the glass in a window. One method to discover Hamlet's ideals regarding womanhood is to study the status of married love and motherhood during the period of his life. Evidently he must have thought of all these things in the light of his training, environment, and background.

The historical period of the drama is in the earlier part of the eleventh century, for that is the period when England recognized the suzerainty of Denmark. Most critics agree, however, that Hamlet reflects the social manners and customs of a person in the Elizabethan Era. If this is true, it seems that Hamlet's ideals would be shaped according to those of the sixteenth century.

If Hamlet is thus considered as a gentleman of the sixteenth century endowed with a "noble mind" and with the "courtier's, scholar's, soldier's eye, tongue, sword,"<sup>2</sup> then his refinement, culture, and ideals arise from one of two sources. They are due to the environment and training, either of Christianity and its Renaissance, or of the pagan Renaissance.

Villare defines the pagan Renaissance as a "Prodigious intellectual activity accompanied by moral decay."<sup>3</sup> Does Hamlet

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2 W. Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. Hudson, London, III, i, 15

3 W. Barry, "The Renaissance," Catholic Encyclopedia New York, 1911, XII, 766, citing Villare.

display the influence of such a spirit? His character seems to agree with the first part of the definition, but scarcely with the latter. In so far as a gentleman of the Renaissance was "a man acquainted with the rudiments at least of scholarship, refined in diction, capable of corresponding or of speaking in choice phrases, open to the beauty of the arts,"<sup>4</sup> Hamlet perfectly fulfills these requisites. Those traits, however, were also characteristic of the Christian Renaissance. The specific difference of the two Renaissances lies in the way the refined manners were employed. The gentleman imbibed with the spirit of the pagan Renaissance believed that:

Anyone who would recapture and hold the greatest charm in life must not prize the supernatural, the theological, or the ascetical above the natural, the human, and the sensual. Satisfaction is better than sacrifice, and self-gratification than self-denial. One should not look to the gods more than to one's self and one's fellows. Indeed, one should strive sympathically to enter into the life and enjoyment of one's contemporaries and, perhaps above all, into the life and enjoyment of ancient Greeks and Romans.<sup>5</sup>

As is evident, the pagan Renaissance tended to cause dissatisfaction with Christian principles and to foster ideals of pleasure radically at variance with Christian concepts. Hamlet

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4 P. Smith, "The Renaissance," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th, London, 1929, XIX, 128.

5 C.J. Hayes, A Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe, New York, 1933, I, 103.

displays just the opposite spirit. From beginning to end, he reveals again and again that he values the supernatural over the sensual and natural. A course of self-denial, not self-gratification, is what he attempts to impress upon his mother. From this it seems that his culture and ideals could only be those of a Christian. The whole drama, especially Hamlet's soliloquies, is filled with religious thoughts and frequent allusions to an invisible power, supreme over human affairs. The tragedy opens "with a preternatural visitor from the spirit world, and closes with the supernatural idea of angels bearing away a human soul to eternal rest."<sup>6</sup> Dr. Ulrici says that "the whole fable, as expressly intimated in the first scene, is based on the religious ideals and moral doctrines of Christianity."<sup>7</sup> Almost all noted critics agree that Hamlet was a Christian and ruled his life by Christian ideals. A satisfactory explanation of many of his actions would otherwise be impossible, as when Hamlet says to his mother, "Confess yourself to Heaven; Repent what's past; avoid what is to come."<sup>8</sup>

The belief that Hamlet was a Christian is further substantiated by the fact that some commentators even make him

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6 S.A. Blackmore, The Riddles of Hamlet and the Newest Answers, Boston, 1917, xviii.

7 Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, 218.

8 Hamlet, III, iv, 149.

a Catholic. That position may be justified from external and internal evidence. Historically the play is set in the eleventh century when the terms Christian and Catholic were synonymous. Because of Hamlet's social characteristics, however, the time of the play is more properly attributed to the Elizabethan Era. Even so, the opinion of those who believe that Hamlet was a Catholic may still be defended from evidence within the play. Hamlet's father speaks of purgatory, a doctrine which is believed only by the Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup> At the time of Ophelia's death a reference is made about singing a requiem mass, which is another Catholic ceremony.<sup>10</sup> Facts such as those made Blackmore feel justified in saying:

There can be little difficulty concerning Hamlet's religion.... Shakespeare...ascribes the existence of the personages of the drama to the age of the first crusade, and portrays them with beliefs and sentiments common to the Catholic world of that day. Hamlet in person reflects the social life and manners prevalent in the dramatist's own time. Yet his prince is strongly characterized as a Christian prince of Denmark, firm in his belief, and unswerving in adherence to its unchanging principles of morality. Hence, Gervinus, certainly an unbiased

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9 The Anglican Church definitely denies the existence of purgatory in its twenty second of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: "The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardon, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Reliques, and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God." The Book of Common Prayer, Oxford, 1866, 314.

10 Hamlet, V, i, 229.



confidently affirm that "The Poet has given prominence to the good quality of the acting personages."<sup>11</sup>

are intended Hamlet to be a Catholic or purpose of this thesis. The important made Hamlet a Christian with high that have an important influence upon the of the most popular Shakespearean criticism that the religious element in Hamlet is of the popularity of the drama.

various peculiarities of the tragedy will be agreed that, while Hamlet called in the specific sense a where is in it nevertheless both a religious ideas, and a more dramatic, intimation of a human evil and good, than other of Shakespeare's tragedies. one of the causes of the special play.<sup>12</sup>

goes further than Bradley and says that

Hamlet but of most of Shakespeare's influence, in so far as they are examples.

hence it may be said that this glory with its Shakespeare, as the

Riddles of Hamlet, 14.

y, Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1914,

outcome and flowerage of all which had preceded it, is itself attributeable to the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. The Christian Faith, which was the theme of Dante's Song had produced the Practical Life which Shakespeare was to sing. For Religion then, as it now and always is, was the soul of Practice; the primary vital fact in men's life.<sup>13</sup>

Bradley says that religious ideas in Hamlet are probably one of the causes for its popularity. Carlyle calls religion the "soul of Practice; the primary vital fact in men's life. These critics, and many of the others as well, would probably agree that a person's religious principles have a strong influence upon a person's actions. Nevertheless, when they explain the causes for Hamlet's actions, they rarely mention this aspect. This thesis will try to fill in that gap. Many of Hamlet's actions, unexplainable to many critics, find a satisfactory solution when studied in the light of his religious background and beliefs, especially regarding womanhood.

The qualities and features that win respect for womanhood today are the same traits that in the pagan world made woman the instrument for the pagan's gross passions. Owing to the influence of Christianity, however, the status of womanhood rose from a position of degradation and abjection to one of esteem and reverence.

First, and before descending to details, we must observe that the grand ideas of Christianity

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<sup>13</sup> T. Carlyle, Sartor Resartus and On Heroes, London, 1921, 334.

with respect to humanity must have contributed, in an extraordinary manner, to the improvement of the lot of woman. These ideas, which applied without any difference to woman as well as to man, were an energetic protest against the state of degradation in which one-half of the human race was placed. The Christian doctrine made the existing prejudices against woman vanish forever; it made her equal to man by unity of origin and destiny, and in the participation of the heavenly gifts; it enrolled her in the universal brotherhood of man, with his fellows and with Jesus Christ; as the companion of man, and no longer as a slave and the vile instrument of pleasure. Henceforth that philosophy which had attempted to degrade her, was silenced; that unblushing literature which treated women with so much insolence found a check in the Christian precepts, and a reprimand no less eloquent than severe in the dignified manner in which all the ecclesiastical writers, in imitation of the scriptures, expressed themselves on woman.<sup>14</sup>

In England the elevation of womanhood until the sixteenth century received its strongest impulse from the example of the Blessed Virgin. Mary was the model to whom all women were compared. A woman was a good wife or mother in so far as she possessed the virtues of Mary, the model of wifeness and motherhood.

This high esteem for women reached its culmination in the sixteenth century, the period during which Hamlet lived. His ideals of womanhood were according to the Christian traditions and atmosphere of his times; and as a devoted son, he found the perfection of his ideals in his mother. When, however, his

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14 J. Balmes, European Civilization, Baltimore, 1850, 136.

mother suddenly destroys these ideals by her incestuous marriage. Hamlet falls into the deepest melancholy and disgust with womanhood as a whole. His mother has outraged not merely a moral scruple, nor simply a mere aesthetic ideal; she has crushed utterly a high spiritual image which had been a guiding principle of Hamlet's whole life, an ideal "rooted in his intellect, enthroned in his will, and enshrined in his heart;"<sup>15</sup> an ideal planted in his heart in earliest childhood and nourished into strength and beauty through youth and young manhood.

If this analysis of Hamlet's character is accepted, then an explanation of his actions--otherwise erratic and mysterious--easily follows. To prove the probability of this analysis will be the main burden of the thesis.

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<sup>15</sup> Blackwell, Riddles of Hamlet, xx.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BLESSED VIRGIN, THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

During the Middle Ages England was noted for her zealous devotion to the Blessed Virgin and commonly called throughout Europe, "Our Lady's Dowry."

'The contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation,' wrote Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1399, 'has drawn all Christian nations to venerate her from whom come the first beginnings of our redemption. But we English, being the servants of her special inheritance and her own Dowry, as we are commonly called, ought to surpass others in the fervour of our praises and devotions.'<sup>1</sup>

In the early seventeenth century Father Claude de la Columbiere, in a sermon preached before the English court, exclaimed:

O unhappy England!... I will not dwell on the honours received by the Mother of God at the hands of Englishmen in other days, nor speak of their devotion to the Queen of angels, so great that England in those days was called the portion or dowry of Mary.<sup>2</sup>

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1 T. Bridgett, Our Lady's Dowry, 4th, London, i.

2 Ibid., vii.

Father Edward Worsley in his book, A Brief Explanation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, published in 1651, said:

I made choice to compose this work in honour of the most Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, whose dowry our own now distracted country was sometimes not undeservedly stiled, both in respect of the peculiar devotion our religious predecessors, above other nations of the Christian world, bore toward her, and her reciprocal procuring, by her powerful intercession, innumerable select favours for them<sup>3</sup>.

In the British Museum is a manuscript, written early in the reign of James I, which likewise points out the strong devotion of the English to Our Lady. This leaflet describes a painting that hung before the altar of St. Edmund, a king of England:

In the middle pane there is a picture of our blessed Ladie. In the next pane upon her left hand, kneeleth a young King, Saint Edmund as it is thought, in a side robe of Scarlet, who lifting up his eyes and handes the globe or patterne of England: presenteth the same to our Lady saying thus:

'O blessed Virgin heere beholde this is thy Dowerie  
Defend it now, preserve it still in all prosperitie.

His sceptuer and his crowne lying before him on a cushion, & St. George in armour standing behind him in the same pane, somewhat leaning forward & laying his right hand in such manner upon the Kings back: that he seemeth to present the King & his presents

to our blessed Ladye. This may induce a man to thinke that it is no newe duised speeche to call England our Ladyes dowerie.<sup>4</sup>

That the English were strongly devoted to Mary is universally admitted. A few authors, such as Mr. Hallam, may call the devotion a 'monstrous superstition,' but no historian denies that the devotion existed. Most will even admit the influence of Mary's example in uplifting womanhood. Mr. Wright, who certainly does not favor anything Catholic, has written that while:

gross attacks on the character of the ladies are common in the Middle Ages, we also frequently meet with poems written in their defence, and in these a very common argument in their favour is founded upon the worthiness of the Virgin Mary.<sup>5</sup>

Some old poems found in the Reliquies Antiquae exemplify how devotion to Mary could uplift the honor of womanhood:

To unpraise women it were a shame,  
For a woman was thy dame;  
Our Blessed Lady beareth the name  
Of all women where that they go.<sup>6</sup>

Christ to His Father He had not ane man;  
See what worship women suld have than!  
That Son is Lord, that Son is King of kings,  
In heaven and earth His majesty aye rings.  
Sen She has borne Him in her haliness,  
And he is well and grund of all guidness,  
All women of us suld have honouring,  
Service, and love above all other thing!<sup>7</sup>

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4 Ibid., v.

5 Ibid., 476.

6 Ibid., 476, (title or author not quoted in book.)

7 Ibid.

Mention of Mary may be found in many ancient manuscript. In the eighth century St. Bede wrote that "the minds of the faithful are...confirmed in solid virtue by the frequent thought of the example of His Mother."<sup>8</sup> Oelfric in the tenth century speaks of the Blessed Virgin as the "comfort and support of all Christian men,"<sup>9</sup> who as the :

heavenly Queen...according to her womanhood,... manifested by her example the heavenly life on earth; for maidenhood is of all virtues queen, and the associate of the heavenly angels. The example and footsteps of this Maiden were followed by an innumerable body of persons in maidenhood, living in purity, renouncing marriage, attaching themselves to the heavenly Bridegroom Christ with steadfast mind and holy converse, and with white garments, to that degree, that very many of them suffered martyrdom for maidenhood, and so with two fold victory went glorious to the heavenly dwelling place.<sup>10</sup>

In the twelfth century St. Aelred calls the Blessed Virgin "the honour of virgins, the glory of women, the praise of men...the Queen of heaven."<sup>11</sup> He adds that "He truly praises her chastity who execrates and scorns all impurity and lust."<sup>12</sup> Also in the twelfth century Peter of Blois boldly proclaimed the spiritual power of Mary: "Let the sun be taken from the uni-

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8 Ibid., 84.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 37.

11 Ibid., 103.

12 Ibid., 45.



verse, and there will be night. Let Mary be taken from heaven, there will be amongst men only darkness and confusion."<sup>13</sup> In a thirteenth century document are found the words, "Our dear Lady St. Mary, who ought to be an example to all women."<sup>14</sup>

These extracts sufficiently indicate what spiritual sway Mary had over women as their model for imitation, over men as their ideal touching womanhood. Mr. Lacky's History of Rationalism summarizes most beautifully and completely the effects Mary's example had not only on the Middle Ages but also on the civilization which inherited its ideals and principles.

The world is governed by its ideals, and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more profound and, on the whole, a more salutary influence than the medieval conception of the Virgin. For the first time woman was elevated to her rightful position, and the sanctity of weakness was recognized as well as the sanctity of sorrow. No longer the slave or the toy of man, no longer associated only with ideas of degradation and of sensuality, woman rose in the person of the Virgin Mother into a new sphere, and became the object of a reverential homage of which antiquity had no conception.

The moral charm and beauty of female excellence was, for the first time felt. A new type of character was called into being, a new kind of admiration was fostered. Into a harsh and ignorant and benighted age this ideal type infused a conception of gentleness and of purity unknown to the proudest generations of the past. In the pages of living tenderness which many a monkist writer has left in honour of his celestial patron; in the millions who,

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13 Ibid., 137.

14 Ibid., 104.

in many lands and in many ages, have sought, with no barren desires, to mould their characters into her image; in those holy maidens, who for the love of Mary, have separated themselves from all the glories and pleasures of the world, to seek, in fastings and vigils and humble charity, to render themselves worthy of her benediction; in the new sense of honour, in the chivalrous respect, in the softening of manners, in the refinement of tastes displayed in all the walks of society, --in these, and in many other ways, we detect its influence. All that was best in Europe clustered around it, and it is the origin of many of the purest elements of our civilization.<sup>15</sup>

The Protestant Reformation attempted to destroy devotion to Mary, but it could not be eradicated simply by proclamations and decrees. Deeply enrooted in their hearts, it was too much a part of the English people to be forgotten over night. Even centuries later traces of its influence were still visible among Protestants. Charles Lamb in the nineteenth century wrote:

Maternal Lady with the virgin grace,  
Heaven-born thy Jesus seemeth sure,  
And thou a Virgin pure.  
Lady most perfect, when thy sinless face  
Men look upon, they wish to be  
A Catholic, Madonna fair, to worship thee.<sup>16</sup>

William Wordsworth also felt Mary's influence, or else he would never have written his famous "The Virgin."

Mother! Whose virgin bosom was uncrosth  
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;

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15 Ibid., 475, (as quoted from Hist. of Rat., ch.III, 44.)

16 Walsh, The World's Great Catholic Poetry, N.Y., 1941, 456

Woman! Above all women glorified,  
 Our tainted nature's solitary boast;  
 Purer than foam on central ocean tost;  
 Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak strewn  
 With fancied roses, than the unblemished moon  
 Before her wane begins on heaven's blue coast;

Thy image falls to earth. Yet, some, I ween,  
 Not unforgiven, the suppliant knee might bend  
 As to a visible power, in which did blend  
 All that was mixed and reconciled in thee  
 Of mother's love with maiden purity,  
 Of high with low, celestial with terrene.<sup>17</sup>

If Protestants were still singing the praises of the Blessed Virgin in the nineteenth century, how much stronger ought her spiritual power to have been felt in the sixteenth century. At that time both Catholic and Protestant ideals regarding womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood were still founded on the person of the Virgin Mary. The Protestant Reformation did not directly intend to destroy the honor and dignity of Mary's virtues, but only the Catholic's pious method of practicing his Marian devotion. Consequently, we find frequent praises of Mary even in the works of Protestant divines. In 1539, Hilsey, an Anglican Bishop, wrote a Primer for Cromwell which contained many lines as: "Holy Mary, most pure of virgins all, Mother and Daughter of the King celestial," or "O glorious Mother of God, O perpetual Virgin Mary, which didst bear the

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17 Ibid., 454.

Lord of all lords."<sup>18</sup>

In a book called, A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man, set forth by the King's Majesty of England, published in 1543, are found such words as: "The Virgin laketh not her laudes, prayse, and thanks for her excellent and singular virtues."<sup>19</sup> Its preface speaks of the:

Incarnation of Christ which is the ground of our salvation, wherein the Blessed Virgin our Lady, for the abundance of grace wherewith God indued her, is also with this remembrance honoured and worshipped.<sup>20</sup>

Although King Henry VIII had decreed all statues and shrines to Mary to be destroyed, still his last will began with the words: "In the name of God and the glorious and Blessed Virgin, our lady St. Mary." This is later followed by the words "Also we do instantly require and desire the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, with all the company of heaven, continually to pray for us."<sup>21</sup>

During the reign of Elizabeth, the Anglican Bishop Sandys wrote in April, 1560:

The queen's majesty considered it not contrary to the Word of God, nay, rather of the advantage

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18 Bridgett, Our Lady's Dowry, 42.

19 Ibid., 412.

20 Ibid., 411.

21 Ibid., 443.

of the Church, that the image of Christ crucified, together with Mary and John, should be placed as heretofore in some conspicuous part of the Church, where they might readily be seen by all the people.<sup>22</sup>

In an epistle of King James I of England to Cardinal Perrone are found the following words:

His most serene Majesty declares that the ever-glorious Virgin is indeed the most Blessed Mother of God, and has no doubt that she has been raised to the highest degree of honour that could be given by the Creator to a human creature.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, there seems no reason to doubt that Mary was still the model for women in the sixteenth century. According to one sixteenth century poet Mary ought to have been the model not only for middle and lower class people but especially for queens and the nobility who are "daughters, wives, and mothers.. of Kings":

In that (O Queen of Queens) thy birth was free  
From guilt, which others do of grace bereave,  
When in their mothers' womb they life receive  
God as his sole-borne daughter loved thee.  
To match thee like thy birth's nobility,  
He thee His Spirit for thy spouse did leave  
Of whom thou didst His only Son conceive,  
And so wast linked to all the Trinity.  
Cease then, O Queens who earthly crowns do wear,  
To glory in the pomp of worldly things;  
If men such high respect unto you bear  
Which daughters, wives, and mothers are of Kings,

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22 Ibid., 412.

23 Ibid., 450.

What honour should unto that Queen be done  
Who had your God for Father, Spouse and Son.<sup>24</sup>

These words could easily enough be the echo of a prince's thoughts. It seems possible that a deeply religious prince during that age would naturally compare his idolized mother to Mary whom Richard Crashaw called the "crown of women, queen of men."<sup>25</sup> It is probable that he would find in his mother, herself a queen, all those virtues to be found in the "Queen of Queens."

As a final step, let this prince be personified in the person of Hamlet, the prince of Denmark. His deep love for his mother made him idealize her moral character, and he placed her virtue on a plane far above her merits. Suddenly an open scandalous sin causes it to fall from such a height. Hamlet finds his life-long ideals lying at his feet, shattered beyond repair. In the meantime, his mother remains completely indifferent towards her sin and the scandal it is causing. That intense melancholy and emotional disorder should so grip his character as to cause him to act from a fiercely vindictive spirit, is hardly surprising under such circumstances.

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Constable, "To Our Blessed Lady," The World's Great Catholic Poetry, 177

<sup>25</sup> R. Crashaw, The Religious Poems of Richard Crashaw, St. Louis, Mo., 1914.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ANGLICAN AND CATHOLIC VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Simply to say that ideals touching womanhood in the sixteenth century were high, is vague. "High" is a relative term, and until it is specifically determined by concrete examples and principles, it cannot convey any definite meaning. In this chapter an attempt will be made to specify the high ideals concretely.

The Church's attitude towards womanhood, especially in regards to marriage, will be discussed first. Then it will be seen whether the Church's ideals in this regard were the layman's ideals, and whether they were ever realized in the actual lives of the people.

In regards to their principles on marriage in the sixteenth century, the Anglican and Catholic Church were identical. They differed on the point of whether it was a sacrament or not, but in all other respects their spirit and attitude towards marriage were the same. Even the words in their marriage ceremony were similar. It hardly could have been otherwise. The Anglican Church had only recently seceded from the Catholic

Church, and it naturally retained many practices and prayers based on the Catholic formula. So to use the words of one is to express the thought of the other concerning marriage.

They both attached a high degree of sacredness to marriage. This is expressed in the Anglican services in the opening prayer:

holy Matrimony...is a honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of Man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, --in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men.<sup>1</sup>

The same comparison of the union between the married couple and that of the Church and Christ is later stated again in order to impress upon the couple the holiness and sacredness of marriage.<sup>2</sup> The Church also advised that marriage should only be entered upon after a period of betrothal. It was not to be undertaken:

unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Book of Common Prayer, Oxford, 1866, 180.

2 "O God who hast consecrated the state of Matrimony to such an excellent mystery, that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church." Ibid., 182.

3 Ibid., 184.



Hamlet almost seems to be echoing that thought when he cries out against his mother's hasty marriage that within:

A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
With which she follow's my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears: --why she, even she, --  
O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourn'd longer, --married with my uncle.<sup>4</sup>

The hastiness of the marriage, however, did not grieve Hamlet as much as the fact that it was an unlawful marriage. His mother had married her husband's brother, an act expressly forbidden by scripture<sup>5</sup> and by a law of the Church.<sup>6</sup> The queen was as much aware of this impediment as Hamlet, (this point will be proven later;) yet, she must have remained silent about it when the following appeal to their conscience was made in the marriage services:

I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth all are not joined together by God; neither is their marriage lawful.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Hamlet, I, ii, 147-151.

5 "And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is impurity; he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness." Bible, Douay version, Lev., 20.21.

6 "A woman may not marry with her Husband's brother," taken from a "table of kindred and Affinity Wherein whosoever are related are forbidden in scripture and our laws to marry together" The Book of Common Prayer, 318.

7 Ibid., 180.

This may appear to be a minor impediment and of little consequence to many people today, but just the opposite feeling prevailed during the sixteenth century. Incest was considered one of the worst immoral acts possible. It had a shocking effect upon Christians and was considered a most disgraceful and scandalous sin.

A marriage with a deceased wife's sister was not legalized in England until the twentieth century; and even a union with a deceased wife's sister's daughter, or any union within three degrees of relationship, was against the law. James I classified incest with witchcraft, sodomy, poisoning, and false-coinage, as "horrible crimes" that he instructed his son, "ye are bound in conscience neuer to forgive." In Scotland, it was punishable by death, and so also in England in 1650 when the civil courts took over from the ecclesiastical authority the enforcement of morals. It was "wicked" and "should not once be accounted under the name of marriage." Shakespeare again and again reflects this utter horror of the crime; in Lucrece, it is "that abomination"; it is "foul" in Pericles; Measure for Measure uses it as a comparison of the deepest infamy; and it supports the climax of Lear's curse addressed to the "great gods." Surely, such a violation of decency accounts for Hamlet's bitterness and for Gertrude's sense of sin.<sup>8</sup>

Shakespeare intended the incestuous marriage to have an important influence upon Hamlet's actions and character. The ghost explicitly refers to it twice, and Hamlet at least three times during the drama. This point, however, will be more fully developed later.

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8 J.W. Draper, The Hamlet of Shakespeare's Audience, Durham, North Carolina, 1938, 115.

A striking similarity can be found between some of the prayers used in the marriage ceremony and the words of Hamlet about marriage. Shakespeare when he wrote the play certainly did not go through the Church's prayers, but he was conscious of the Church's doctrine on marriage. This would seem to imply that it was so interwoven into the lives of the people that they did have to go to a book to find out their obligations. In the marriage service the groom is asked:

Will thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Will thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?<sup>9</sup>

Hamlet tells how scrupulously his father fulfilled the vow. His father was so

loving to my mother,  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly.<sup>10</sup>

The ghost also affirms how faithfully these vows were kept. In simple but beautiful words he says his

love was of that dignity,  
That it went hand in hand even with the vow  
I made to her in marriage.<sup>11</sup>

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9 The Book of Common Prayer, 180.

10 Hamlet, I, ii, 140-143.

11 Ibid., I, v, 49-50.

The king fulfilled his obligation to "perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made,...and remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws."<sup>12</sup> The queen had also vowed to "live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony."<sup>13</sup> Yet, she failed to "keep the vow" because she had failed to "live according to thy law," a law which explicitly forbade a woman to marry her husband's brother.<sup>14</sup> Because of the queen's disregard for this sacred law of God, Hamlet bitterly complains that she has made "marriage vows As false as dicers' oaths."<sup>15</sup> Hamlet's pain was increased when he would remember that at one time the queen

would hang on him (the king)  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on.<sup>16</sup>

In caring for her appearance, the queen was not so interested in deepening love between them as in obtaining praise. How different that is from the motives put forward by the Church

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible; even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.<sup>17</sup>

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12 The Book of Common Prayer, 180

13 Ibid., 180.

14 Ibid., 318.

15 Hamlet., III, iv, 45.

16 Ibid., I, ii, 144.

17 The Book of Common Prayer, 183.

Instead of showing "a meek and quiet spirit," instead of being "loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to her husband; and in all quietness, sobriety, and peace, be a follower of holy and godly matrons,"<sup>18</sup> the queen performed

Such an act  
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;  
Calls virtue hypocrite; takes off the rose  
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
And sets a blister there; makes marriage-vows  
As false as dicer's oaths: O, such a deed  
As from the body of contraction (marriage) plucks  
The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face doth glow;  
Yea, this solidity and compound mass  
With tristful visage, as against the doom  
Is thought-sick at the act.<sup>19</sup>

Hamlet refused to recognize Claudius as his father and told him that "father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh."<sup>20</sup> In these words Hamlet once again seems to be echoing the Church's command that "they two shall be one flesh," and "that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom thou by matrimony has made one."<sup>21</sup>

Up to this point the prayers from the Anglican service have been employed to point out the sacred obligations of marriage. That the Catholic Church regarded marriage with the same

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18 Ibid., 182.

19 Hamlet., III, iv, 40-51.

20 Ibid., III, vii, 52.

21 The Book of Common Prayer, 182.

degree of sacredness as the Anglican is immediately revealed in the opening words of its service.

You are about to enter into a union which is most sacred and most serious. It is most sacred, because established by God Himself; most serious, because it will bind you together for life in a relationship so close and so intimate, that it will profoundly influence your whole future. That future, with its hopes and disappointments, its pains, its joys and its sorrows, is hidden from your eyes. You know that these elements are mingled in every life, and are to be expected in your own.<sup>22</sup>

To quote any more of the Catholic service would be merely to repeat what has already been said from the Anglican ceremony. As has been pointed out before, the two are alike, for the Anglican services derived almost all their prayers from the Catholic formula. Both express the sacredness of marriage by comparing the union of husband and wife to the mystical union of Christ and His Church. Both express its indissolubility by adopting the words of Christ, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Both stress the need of sacrifice and generosity based on conjugal love in order to overcome difficulties and to fulfil the solemn obligations imposed on them by their marriage vows. Both make the couple vow "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Priest's New Ritual, Rev.P.Griffith, Baltimore, 1939, 206.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 210.

Both Churches put the eternal seal upon the marriage by the invocation of the Blessed Trinity. Both use the ring as a token and symbol of the vow between the newly married couple. Finally both pray that God will protect and bless them "in the holy bonds of matrimony."<sup>24</sup>

That was the Church's doctrine regarding marriage in the sixteenth century. The next question to be asked is whether the Elizabethan people actually believed and practiced these ideals. That step was skipped over when Hamlet's thoughts were compared to the Church's regarding marriage. Now it ought to be proved. The proofs will be explained in the following order. It will be shown: first, that English noblemen held marriage and womanhood in high esteem; secondly, that they expected the women among the nobility to live up to their ideals; and thirdly, that women actually lived up to these ideals and reached this perfection. For proof resort must be had to different works written about womankind during the period itself.

Some good examples can be found in two of Spenser's poems, his Amoretti and Epithalamion. The Amoretti was addressed to the lady who did become his wife, and the thoughts expressed in it arose from their actual courtship, just as the thoughts in his Epithalamion arose from their marriage. Because of their

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24 Ibid., 211.

autobiographical nature, it may be believed that the expression of Spenser's feelings was genuine, that he actually believed and felt what he wrote, and that he honored and respected her as deeply as he claimed.

The fortunate man, Spenser says, is he who has won for himself the love of a woman with high ideals:

Thrise happie she that is so well assured  
 Unto her selfe, and settled so in hart,  
 That nether will for better be allured  
 Ne feared with worse to any chaunce to start:  
 But like a steddye ship, doth strongly prt  
 The raging waves, and keepes her course aright...  
 Such selfe assurance need not feare the spight  
 Of grudging foes, ne favour seek of friends:  
 But in the stay of her owne stedfast might,  
 Nether to one her selfe nor other bends.  
 Most happy she that most assured doth rest;<sup>25</sup>  
 But he most happy who such one loves best.

Like the Church, Spenser believed that marriage should not be hastily undertaken. A reasonable amount of time ought to be allowed to pass so that the love may be proven to be real love and not just infatuation. Former suitors for his fiancée's hand had complained of her seeming coldness and indifference towards their profession of love to her. They thought it was due to her pride and love of herself. Spenser, however, believed that her unresponse to the lover's pleas was her way of safeguarding her honor and high ideals. She believed that true

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25 E. Spenser, *Amoretti*, in *The Complete Poetical Works Of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Dodge, Boston, 1908, stanza lix.



love was something more than an emotion or passion. A married couple ought to have a union of mutual esteem and appreciation for each other that will help them achieve harmony in the vast community of interests that make up a married life. Love of this type grows slowly, but once it has taken root, it is all-consuming and eternal. Because of those reasons Spenser experienced more happiness than pain in her seeming coldness.

Be nought dismayd that her unmoved mind  
 Doth still persist in her rebellious pride:  
 Such love, not lyke to lusts of baser kynd,  
 The harder wonne, the firmer will abide.  
 The durefull oake, whose sap is not yet dride,  
 Is long ere it conceive the kindling fyre:  
 But when it once doth burne, it doth divide  
 Great heat, and makes his flames to heaven aspire.  
 So hard it is to kindle new desire  
 In gentle brest, that shall endure for ever:  
 Deepe is the wound that dints the parts entire  
 With chast affects, that naught but death can sever  
 To knit the knot that ever shall remaine.<sup>26</sup>

In almost every verse he expresses deep reverence for the lady of his love, but the important thing to notice is on what his love and reverence is founded. He praises her physical beauty, but "That which fairest is but few behold, Her mind, adorned with virtues mainifold."<sup>27</sup> Because she is "adorned with honour, love and chastity,"<sup>28</sup> Spenser says, "Deepe in the closet

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26 Ibid, stanza vi.

27 Ibid, stanza xv.

28 Ibid., stanza lxix.

of my parts entyre, Her worth is written with a golden quill."<sup>29</sup>  
 Her innocence made their wedding day "holy"<sup>30</sup> when "Clad all in  
 white, that seemes a virgin best"<sup>31</sup> "she before the altar stands  
 Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes, And blesseth her  
 with his two hands."<sup>32</sup> Because of her moral integrity and good-  
 ness he extols her as a model for other women.

Tell me, ye merchants daughters, did ye see  
 Sofayre a creature in your towne before,  
 So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she,  
 Adorned with beautyes grace and vertues store?

.....  
 But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,  
 The inward beauty of her lively spright,  
 Garnished with heavenly guifts of high degree,  
 Much more then would ye wonder at that sight,  
 And stand astonisht lyke to those which red  
 Medusaes mazeful hed.

There dwels sweet Love, and constant Chastity,  
 Unspotted Fayth, and comely Womanhood,  
 Regard of Honour, and mild Modesty;  
 There Vertue raynes as queens in royal throne,  
 And giveth lawes alone,  
 The which the base affections doe obay,  
 And yeeld theyr services unto her will;  
 Ne thought of thing uncomely ever may  
 Thereto approach to tempt her mind to ill.<sup>33</sup>

"Sweet Love," "constant Chastity," "Unspotted Fayth," "Comely  
 Womanhood," "Regard of Honour," "mild Modesty" --these are the

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29 Ibid., stanza lxxxiv.

30 Epithalamion, from Spenser's Complete Works, line 24

31 Ibid., line 151.

32 Ibid., lines 224, 225.

33 Ibid., lines 167-222.

virtues that formed Spenser's highest ideals of womanhood, the virtues that made him call his loved one "My soverayne saynt, the idoll of my thought."<sup>34</sup> They are the virtues that won for womanhood so high a throne in men's mind, for they are the virtues that the Blessed Virgin, the model of all women, possessed in the highest degree. Finally, they are the virtues that Hamlet had always believed his mother to possess until his great disillusionment.

The moral excellence which "raynes as queene" within Spenser's loved one is the constant theme interwoven into every stanza. True beauty exists, he says, not in the flesh but in a virtuous mind, for all perfect beauty is derived from God, whose beauty is His goodness.

Men call you fayre, and you doe credit it,  
 For that your selfe ye dayly such doe see:  
 But the trew fayre, that is the gentle wit  
 And vertuous mind, is much more prayd of me,  
 For all the rest, how ever fayre it be  
 Shall turne to nought and loose that glorious hew:  
 But onely that is permanent, and free  
 From frayle corruption, that doth flesh ensew.  
 That is true beautie: that doth argue you  
 to be divine, and borne of heavenly seed,  
 Derived from that fayre Spirit from whom al true  
 And perfect beauty did at first proceed.  
 He onely fayre, and what he fayre hath made;  
 All other fayre, lyke flowers, untymely fade.<sup>35</sup>

Spenser loves his lady passionately, but his love mainly flows from what he calls her "true Beautie," that is, her

virtue. Her presence always uplifts him. Her face inspires him not to longing but to renunciation, not to lust but to purest love. Her friendship never pulls his ideals down but rather lifts them to the pure heights on which she stands:

The soverayne beauty which I doo admyre,  
 Witnesse the world how worthy to be prayzed;  
 The light whereof hath kindled heavenly fyre  
 In my fraile spirit, by her from basenesse rayssed:  
 That being now with her huge brightnesse dazed  
 Base thing I can no more endure to view;<sup>36</sup>

You frame my thoughts, and fashion me within,  
 You stop my tounge, and teach my hart to speake,  
 You calme the storme that passion did begin,  
 Strong through your cause, but by your vertue weak.  
 Dark is the world where your light shined never;  
 Well is he borne that may behold you ever.<sup>37</sup>

Let not one sparke of filthy lustfull fyre  
 Break out, that may her sacred peace molest;  
 Ne one light glance of sensuall desyre  
 Attempt to work her gentle mindes unrest:  
 But pure affections bred in spotlesse brest,  
 And modest thoughts breathd from wel tempred sprites.<sup>38</sup>

Because they had learned the true meaning of love from Christ, Spenser knew that their love for each other would be pure and eternal. Their love was not Eros, which is understood as love of the flesh, but Agape or love of God. Their love arose from and was united to a love that was greater than their own

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35 Ibid., lxxix.

36 Ibid., iii.

37 Ibid., viii.

38 Ibid., lxxxiii.

love. Their love was a spark issuing from the great flame of the God of love:

And grant that we, for whom thou didest dye,  
 Being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin,  
 May live for ever in felicity:  
 And that thy love we weighing worthily,  
 May likewise love thee for the same againe;  
 And for thy sake, that all lyke deare didst buy,  
 With love may one another entertayne.  
 So let us love dear love, lyke as we ought:  
 Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.<sup>39</sup>

Love that flows from Divine Love is a sacred love, and as such, it is a means created by God to help souls reach Him. It is intended to terminate in marriage, which of its very nature is a state of moral perfection. Spenser thus pays his greatest tribute to his beloved by a beautiful comparison:

This holy season, fit to fast and pray,  
 Men to devotion ought to be inclynd:  
 Therefore, I lykewise, on so holy day,  
 For my sweet saynt some service fit will find.  
 Her temple fayre is built within my mind,  
 In which my thoughts doo day and night attend,  
 Lyke sacred priests that never think amisse.  
 There I to her, as th' author of my blisse,  
 Will builde an altar to appease her yre;  
 And on the same my hart will sacrificise,  
 Burning in flames of pure and chaste desyre:  
 The which vouchsafe, O goddesse, to accept,  
 Amongst thy dearest relicks to be kept.<sup>40</sup>

But imagine what would happen if Spenser were suddenly to discover that his fiancée's moral character was base and

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39 Ibid., lxviii.

40 Ibid., xxii.

sensual, that her love went no deeper than the flesh, that she had committed openly some incestuous act. Confusion, frustration, bewilderment, melancholy, hysteria, perhaps even the temptation to commit suicide would seize his soul. Yet, commentators as Stoll, Robertson, Schucking, and others think that it is strange that such a disposition could take possession of Hamlet's mind at the discovery of his mother's base sensuality. They seem to forget, or have never realized, that Hamlet has also built within his mind a Christian temple to womanhood just as glorious as that of Spenser's. They forget that Hamlet has given his mother as the ideal model for women, the place of honor within this temple, and that his "thoughts doo day and night attend Like sacred priests" with reverence and honor upon this "sweet Saynt."

Spenser's wife stands not alone in the sixteenth century as a woman of high ideals. Other examples may be drawn from the nobility of England, such as Margaret of Beaufort, the mother of King Henry VII. In speaking of her nobility of soul, Cardinal Fisher said in her funeral eulogy that "She had in manner all that was praysable in a woman eyther in soule or in body. He gave examples to show that she was bounteous, affable, gentle to all, unkind to none, nor forgetful of kindness, "which is no lytel parte of veray nobleness."<sup>41</sup> He praised her virtues, her

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<sup>41</sup> Mayor, The English Works of John Fisher, London, 1876, 291.

power of forgiveness, her tender mercy for the suffering, and her compassion for the poor, whom she would visit and comfort in their sickness. As regards obligations touching her own person, she was

to God & to the chirche full obeyent & tractable  
serchyng his honoure & pleasure full besyly. A warenes  
of herself she had always to eschewe euery thyng that  
myght dyshonest any noble woman, or dystayne her  
honour in any condycyon.<sup>42</sup>

After her husband's death she renewed the vow of chastity that she had taken with her husband's consent shortly before his death.<sup>43</sup> The cardinal concluded his eulogy by saying that if the poor to whom she was so generous, the students of the universities to whom she was a mother, and all the virtuous and devout persons to whom she was a loving sister felt so deeply the loss of their close friend, then with much more reason did "All the noble men and women to whom she was a myrroure and exemplar of honour" have cause to mourn her death.<sup>44</sup>

The cardinal stressed that last point. His purpose in praising her virtues so highly was "not vaynly to extol or to magnifye aboute her merytes, but to the edefyenge of other by the example of her." Cardinal Fisher realized that good example

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42 Ibid., 291.

43 Ibid., 294.

44 Ibid., 301.

was "Much more to be prayed in the nobles," because of their influence over the common folk.<sup>45</sup> The cardinal praised Margaret as being a singularly high example of the perfect wife and mother, and a model of piety, purity, and goodness.

If good example among the nobility strongly influences and uplifts the morals among the lower classes, much more powerful is bad example in tearing them down. When Hamlet returned to Denmark, he found the queen living in sin with his uncle. This was another source of his grief and bitterness, for he knew that his mother's sin not only scandalized the people, but also gave them an encouragement and incentive to evil.

The last example of an ideal wife and mother to be drawn from the nobility of the sixteenth century is that of Katherine of Aragon, the wife of King Henry VIII. After twenty years of married life, the king began to question the legitimacy of his marriage to Katherine on the grounds that she had previously been married to his brother. As it has already been pointed out, such an act was forbidden by the Church, and it was this same prohibition that made the marriage of Hamlet's mother to Claudius incestuous.

The fact that Henry could use such an objection in an

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45 Ibid., 294.



attempt to obtain a divorce after he had been married twenty years to Katherine points out once again the importance attached to this law of the Church on marriage. The conscientious observance and the sacredness of the law in the eyes of the people is an important point to remember. Its violation explains many of Hamlet's actions and is the fundamental reason why Hamlet was so disturbed by his mother's marriage to his uncle and why he continually called their relationship incestuous and sacrilegious.

The law, however, that forbids a man to marry his brother's wife, presupposes that the first marriage was consummated. In the case of Katherine her first husband Arthur had been an invalid, and the marriage between the two had never been consummated. On the grounds that Katherine was still a virgin, the pope was justly able to grant a dispensation and allow her to marry Henry after her first husband had died.

As a matter of fact it was well known that Henry did not have a real scruple about the validity of his marriage, but that he only wanted some excuse for marrying Anne Bolleyn. The sympathy of the people for Katherine and their anger at the king went to such an extent that at one time Anne Bolleyn, in order to save her life, "had to flee from an irate mob of thousands of women."<sup>46</sup> Such an action of the part of the English people is

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<sup>46</sup> M. Audin, Life of Henry the Eighth, trans. by Brown N.Y., 1852, 219.

another indication of how sacred and eternal they considered the marriage contract.

Pope Clement VII also saw through Henry's pretense and told him to end the scandal by returning to his true and virtuous wife.

It is not the Catholic alone who is scandalized, but the heretic also rejoices in seeing you ignominiously expel from your court a queen, the daughter of a king, the aunt of an empress, your wife for upwards of twenty years, while you are publicly living in defiance of our prohibition with another woman. Had one of your subjects behaved thus, you would have punished him severely. My son, set not such a bad example to your people,... Remember that the examples of kings, and especially of great kings, serve as a rule of conduct to their subjects... recall Katherine and restore her to her rights and to your affection.<sup>47</sup>

Katherine saw through Henry's excuse and knew that no divorce could be legitimately granted. In order to remain faithful to her marriage vows, she knew that she was dutifully bound to defend her title as Henry's wife, no matter how much suffering it would cost her. When some lords asked her to put the question to eight lords in order to quiet the king's conscience, she answered:

I pray God send his Grace a quiet conscience.  
As for answer to your message; I pray you tell the King,  
I am his lawful Wife, and so will abide, till the Court

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47 Ibid., 213.

of Rome determine the contrary.<sup>48</sup>

Katherine ordered her life according to God's laws, and being deeply and implicitly a Catholic, she judged Henry as another Catholic. Although she no longer possessed the affections and love of her husband, she knew that a divorce was impossible. It would mean infidelity by both of them to their marriage contract in which they solemnly vowed to be husband and wife until death parted them. Katherine's continual struggles until her death to maintain her rights as Henry's wife well indicate how sacred she considered her marriage vows.

Katherine learned with sorrow that...Henry was desirous to brand her with the crime of incest, and Mary, his child, as the fruit of his sacrilegious marriage, and to place the crown of St. Edward on the head of his mistress. Maternal love made Katherine a heroine. She resolved, at the foot of the crucifix to defend even to death her sacred rights as mother, wife, and queen; and not for an instant did she flinch from her resolution. She is the strong woman of holy writ who obtained courage by the contemplation of heaven... The queen replied that she came a virgin to his bed, and that she should leave it pure; that it was insulting God to ask theologians, whether during eighteen years Mary's mother had not been living in incest.<sup>49</sup>

Katherine knew that justice was on her side. Her innocence gave her strength to defend her cause; her sincerity, the power to penetrate through the hypocrisy of others. When Campeg-

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<sup>48</sup> E.L. Herbert, Autobiography and History of England Under Henry VIII, London, 1683, 354.

<sup>49</sup> Audin, Life of Henry VIII, 141.

as he did not transgress God's law, and she did her best to remain amiable and cheerful amidst her sorrows and afflictions.

For this fact there is the statement of Sir John Wallop.

"The English ambassador here," says Marin Guistinian, writing to the Signory from Paris, "does not approve the divorce, and praises the wisdom, innocence, and patience of queen Katherine.... He says that the Queen was as beloved as if she had been of the blood royal of England."... She had nothing of the sourness of the recluse about her. Foreign ambassadors are unanimous in commending the smiles and cheerfulness expressed in her countenance throughout the terrible ordeal to which she was subjected.<sup>52</sup>

Even after Henry had obtained his so-called divorce, Katherine insisted that she was still queen and the lawful wife of Henry. The king's counsellors accused Katherine of clinging to the title out of pride. They warned her that her daughter might be completely disinherited unless she were to forgo them, but she responded:

Do you accuse me of pride, when I wish to prove to the world that I am the wife and not the concubine of a prince with whom I have lived for twenty years. Mary is my beloved child, the daughter of the King and Queen of England. Such I received her from God, and as such I give her to her father. Like her mother, she will live and die an honest woman. Speak not to me of any danger that my daughter may incur. I have no fear for him who has only power over the body; but I fear Him who has alone power over the soul.<sup>53</sup>

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52 J.S. Brewer, The Reign of Henry VIII, 1884, II, 161, 162.

53 Audin, Life of Henry VIII, 226.

Although Katherine was disinherited, she was always conscious of her moral obligations towards her husband and king. Nowhere else does her loyalty and fidelity stand out more clearly than the letter that she wrote to her husband when she was dying.

My most Dear Lord, King, and Husband,

The hour of my death now approaching, I cannot chuse, out of love I bear you, advise you of your Souls health, which you ought to prefer before all considerations of the world or flesh whatsoever. For which yet you have cast me into many calamities, and your self into many troubles. But I forgive you all; and pray God to do so likewise. For the rest I commend unto you Mary, our daughter, beseeching you to be a good Father to her, as I have heretofore desired... Lastly, I make this Vow, that mine eyes desire you above all things.

Farewell<sup>54</sup>

The historian Herbert then adds, "The King having received the letter, became so compassionate that he wept."<sup>55</sup> From these few historical passages it is easily understandable why it has been said of Katherine that she "was highly accomplished and a model of every feminine virtue."<sup>56</sup> Her character is a perfect example of the Church's ideal of a loyal wife and mother when afflicted with the most bitter and sorrowful trials.

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54 Herbert, Autobiography and Hist....., 432.

55 Ibid.

56 Audin, Life of Henry VIII, 25.

Katherine possessed the type of queenly character that Hamlet believed his own mother to have. Hamlet believed that the same courage and fidelity would shine forth from his mother's character if it were ever to be put to the test. Under such circumstances imagine what a disillusionment it must have been to Hamlet when his mother exposed her shallow character and revealed to him her true worth.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHAKESPEARE'S IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

In the last chapter the great reverence and sacredness that both the Catholic and Anglican Church had in regard to marriage was proven. The purpose of the chapter was to prove that in the sixteenth century the ideals of the lay people were lofty and in agreement with those of the Church.

The main purpose of this chapter is to show what are Shakespeare's ideals touching womanhood, and whether or not he esteemed marriage and its obligations highly. Since there is a scarcity of material about Shakespeare's personal life, one is forced to draw out and separate from his fictitious writings his own personal opinion on a particular subject. Such a method cannot give certitude, but it can give a high degree of probability, for it is impossible for a person to write over one hundred and fifty sonnets, thirty six plays and two long poems without revealing something about himself. So, from the lips of Shakespearean characters it will be attempted to give Shakespeare's ideals of womanhood.

Through the words of Juliet, Shakespeare expresses what hardships a wife ought to be willing to undergo rather than to be faithless to her marriage vows.

O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris  
 From off the battlements of yonder tower;  
 Or walk in thievish ways; or bid me lurk  
 Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears;  
 Or shut me, nightly in a charnel-house,  
 O'er-cover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,  
 With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls;  
 Or bid me go into a new-made grave,  
 And hide me with a dead man in his shroud;  
 Things that to hear them told, have made me tremble;  
 And I will do it without fear or doubt,  
 To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet Love.<sup>1</sup>

In the Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare states more directly and fully the obligations of husband and wife to each other.

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
 Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,  
 And for thy maintenance commits his body  
 To painful labour both by sea and land,  
 To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,  
 Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;  
 And craves no other tribute at thy hands  
 But love, fair looks and true obedience;  
 Too little payment for so great a debt.  
 Such duty as the subject oweth to the prince  
 Even such a woman oweth to her husband;  
 And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,  
 And not obedient to his honest will,  
 What is she but a foul contending rebel,  
 And graceless traitor to her loving lord?  
 I am ashamed that women are so simple  
 To offer war where they should kneel for peace;

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1 Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, IV, 1, 177-188.



Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,  
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.<sup>2</sup>

Those words echo the thoughts of the Church concerning marriage. Faithfulness, understanding, love, obedience--these are the virtues a wife owes to her husband. Shakespeare often vested even his pagan characters with this Christian attitude, as in Portia's appeal to her husband.

My Brutus;  
You have some sick offense within your mind,  
Which by the right and virtue of my place  
I ought to know of: and, upon my knees,  
I charm you, by my once commended beauty  
By all your vows of love and that great vow  
Which did incorporate and make us one,  
That you unfold to me, yourself, your half,  
Why you are heavy...  
Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,  
Is it expected that I should know no secrets  
That appertain to you? Am I yourself  
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,  
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,  
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs  
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more  
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.<sup>3</sup>

So closely united in body and mind are husband and wife that the sorrows, joys, possessions, and secrets of one belong to the other as well. The sacred and eternal ties of marriage merge the two into one. Love becomes supreme because marriage according to Shakespeare is the "contract of eternal bond of love."<sup>4</sup>

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2 Shakespeare, V, ii, 146-162.

3 Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, V, i, 151.

Another character who is a beautiful personification of Shakespeare's ideal of womanhood is Desdemona. This "True and loving" wife of Othello was "a maiden never bold, of spirit so still and quiet that her motion blushed at herself." She was the "sweetest innocent that ev'r lift up eye," and remained "chaste and heavenly true" to her jealous husband. Even when Desdemona is rashly and unjustly accused by her husband, she loves him and vows to continue loving him no matter how cruelly he may treat her.

Here I kneel:

If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love  
 Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,  
 Or that I do not yet, and ever did,  
 And ever will, though he do shake me off  
 To beggarly divorcement, love him dearly,  
 Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much;  
 But never taint my love, I cannot say 'whore':  
 It doth abhor me now I speak the word;  
 To do the act that might the addition earn  
 Not the world's mass of vanity could make me.<sup>5</sup>

Of all his characters, however, Shakespeare pays his greatest tribute to womankind by his portrayal of Katherine of Aragon in Henry VIII. The historical reference mentioned above furnished Shakespeare with the materials for his splendid characterization of this truly great and courageous Catholic queen of England. In her Shakespeare finds a model of his highest ideals. Captivated by her character and inspired by her spirit,

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4 Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, II, 1, 267-287.

5 Shakespeare, Othello, IV, ii, 152-162.

Shakespeare wrote so passionately of her that William Hazlitt says,

The character of Queen Katherine is the most perfect delineation of matronly dignity, sweetness, and resignation, that can be conceived. Her appeals to the protection of the king, her remonstrances to the cardinals, her conversations with her women show a noble and generous spirit accompanied with the utmost gentleness of nature.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Johnson says,

The genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Katherine... The meek sorrows and virtuous distress of Katherine have furnished some scenes which may justly be numbered among the greatest efforts of tragedy.<sup>7</sup>

Shakespeare took great pains to portray the protagonists in Henry VIII without essentially changing their historical characters. This historical truthfulness has a greater significance when it is remembered that the play was performed before an Elizabethan audience during the reign of Elizabeth, the daughter of the woman who succeeded Katherine in the affections of Henry. In spite of danger to his reputation and even perhaps his freedom, Shakespeare presented the character of Katherine as history knew her, even though by contrast the characters of Henry and Anne appeared less noble.

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<sup>6</sup> W. Hazlitt, "Henry VIII," Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, London, 1934, 197.

<sup>7</sup> S. Johnson, "General Observations on the Plays of Shakespeare," The Works of Samuel Johnson, London, 1906, 213.

Katherine may properly be called the heroine in the play. From her first appearance in which she is found interceding for the people oppressed by taxes until her last when she again is pleading for the poor, she is indeed the "queen of earthly queens."<sup>8</sup>

Besides being a "good queen"<sup>9</sup> to the people, Katherine also conducted herself as a "true and humble wife at all times,"<sup>10</sup> and "so good a lady that no tongue could ever pronounce dishonour of her."<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare takes this unique example of a perfect wife and queen from history and immortalizes her. He first eulogizes her through the lips of the Duke of York when he says,

He counsels a divorce; a loss of her  
That, like a jewel, has hung twenty years  
About his neck, yet never lost her lustre;  
Of her that loves him with that excellence  
That angels love good men with; even of her  
That, when the greatest stroke of fortune falls  
Will bless the king: and is not this course pious?<sup>12</sup>

The Lord Chamberlain shows that the Duke of York's thoughts are those of the people when he immediately adds, "'Tis

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8 Shakespeare, Henry VIII, II, iv, 141.

9 Ibid., II, i, 158.

10 Ibid., II, iv, 23.

11 Ibid., II, iii, 3.

12 Ibid., II, ii, 31-40.

most true, These news are everywhere; every tongue speaks 'em,  
And every true heart weeps for 't"<sup>12</sup>

Shakespeare gives the master stroke to Katherine's character by placing her praises in the mouth of Anne Bullen, who will succeed Katherine in the affections of the king.

Here's the pang that pinches:  
His highness having lived so long with her, and she  
So good a lady that no tongue could ever  
Pronounce dishonour of her; by my life  
She never knew harm-doing: O, now, after  
So many courses of the sun enthroned,  
Still growing in a majesty and pomp, the which  
To leave a thousand-fold more bitter than  
'Tis sweet at first to acquire, --after this process,  
To give her the avaunt! it is a pity  
Would move a monster.<sup>13</sup>

Katherine, deeply wronged and heavily burdened with sorrow, has become:

the most unhappy woman living...  
Shipwreck'd upon a kingdom, where no pity,  
No friends, no hope; no kindred weep for me;  
That once was mistress of the field and flourish'd  
I'll hang my head and perish.<sup>14</sup>

The suffering and friendless queen is not, however, a weak and helpless woman. She has a moral strength that towers over her adversaries:

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12 Ibid., II, ii, 38-40.

13 Ibid., II, iii, 1-11.

14 Ibid., III, i, 145-153.

I am about to weep; but thinking that  
 We are a queen or long have dream'd so, certain  
 The daughter of a king, my drops of tears  
 I'll turn to sparks of fire.<sup>15</sup>

Her simplicity and goodness of heart enables her to see through Wolsey's duplicity, and she intends to fight for her rights and titles as mother and wife. Wolsey was one of those who have "angels' faces," but whose heart only "heaven knows."<sup>16</sup> She justly scorns his crooked policy and is not afraid to throw the following challenge at him:

I do believe

Induced by potent circumstances, that  
 You are mine enemy, and make my challenge  
 You shall not be my judge: for it is you  
 Have blown this coal betwixt my lord and me;  
 Which God's dew quench! Therefore I say again  
 I utterly abhor, yea, from my soul  
 Refuse you for my judge; whom, yet once more,  
 I hold my most malicious foe, and think not  
 At all a friend to truth.<sup>17</sup>

Katherine knows that truth is on her side, but she is humble enough to realize her weakness and the impossibility of her getting the better of Wolsey in an argument.

My lord, my lord,  
 I am a simple woman, much too weak  
 To oppose your cunning. You're meek and humble-mouth'd;  
 You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,

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15 Ibid., II, iv, 70-73.

16 Ibid., III, i, 145.

17 Ibid., II, iv, 76-84.

With meekness and humility; but your heart  
Is cramm'd with arrogancy, spleen, and pride.<sup>18</sup>

Esteem for Katherine reaches its highest point in the court room scene. She has been wronged and has suffered unjustly, as everyone in the courtroom knew; but who does not know that a courageous woman is at her noblest or has the opportunity of being at her noblest when she is most beaten and down? Then may she prove, as at no other time, her endurance, her magnanimity, the depths of her generosity and love. Katherine approaches with humility and respect and kneels at the feet of the king. Strongly conscious of her rights and of her duty, she allows the warmth of her temper to break through the meekness of her spirit, and she turns her tears into sparks of fire. In this, her last appeal to the king, like a true queen and wife she challenges anyone in the court to bring anything against her honor, love, duty, or bond of wedlock:

Sir, I desire you do me right and justice,  
And to bestow your pity on me... Alas, sir,  
In what have I offended you? what cause  
Hath my behaviour given to your displeasure  
That thus you should proceed to put me off,  
And take your good grace from me? Heaven witness,  
I have been to you a true and humble wife,  
At all times to your will conformable;  
Even in fear to kindle your dislike,  
Yea, subject to your countenance, glad or sorry  
As I saw it inclined: when was the hour  
I ever contradicted your desire,  
Or made it not mine too? Or which of your friends

Have I not strove to love, although I knew  
 He were mine enemy? what friend of mine  
 That had to him derived your anger, did I  
 Continue in my liking? nay, gave notice  
 He was from thence discharged? Sir call to mind  
 That I have been your wife, in this obedience,  
 Upward of twenty years, and have been blest  
 With many children by you: if, in the course  
 And process of this time, you can report,  
 And prove it too, against mine honour aught,  
 My bond of wedlock or my love and duty,  
 Against your sacred person, in God's name,  
 Turn me away; and let the foul'st contempt  
 Shut door upon me, and so give me up  
 To the sharpest kind of justice.<sup>19</sup>

These words are spoken not with arrogance or pride, but with the strength and courage that a wife ought to display in defense of her honor. To have remained quiet and not to assert her rights in such a situation would have been wrong. In this speech Shakespeare joins nearly all the possible virtues an ideal wife could possess. The queen first asks for the protection she ought to have from her husband and demands to know why he is treating her in just the opposite fashion. Then she makes her defense and calls upon God to witness that she always:

- 1 has been a true and humble wife;
- 2 tried to do what he wanted her to do;
- 3 avoided whatever would be displeasing to him;
- 4 suffered or was happy accordingly as he suffered or was happy;
- 5 followed his desires rather than contradict him;
- 6 strove and tried her best to love his friends even though they may have been her enemies;
- 7 severed her connections from any of her friends who were displeasing to him;
- 8 has been faithful to her marriage vows and loyal to him even



9 in the smallest details for over twenty years;  
 was willing to undergo any punishment, however severe, even to the extent of laying her head on the block if he could find a single fault against her being a perfect wife, mother, or queen.

It is a challenge of a wife and queen defending everything that was or ever would be dear to her, and in his heart the king knows that she is right. He has lived twenty years with her and has learned to respect her, almost to revere her. Within her there is a strength that makes Henry admire her; a strength which nothing the lords or cardinals said or did could bend, a strength and certainty in herself and her own just cause. The king was of a royal nature and still sensible to the stirrings of royalty in others, for he has not yet entirely cast off his better and nobler feelings. His wife's words moved him, as they did everyone else in the court. Momentarily Henry is true to his better nature and launches out in praise of the queen after her departure.

Go thy ways, Kate:

That man in the world who shall report he has  
 A better wife, let him in nought be trusted,  
 For speaking false in that: thou art, alone--  
 If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness,  
 Thy meekness saint-like, wife-like government,  
 Obeying in commanding, and thy parts  
 Sovereign and pious else, could speak thee out,  
 The queen of earthly queens: she's noble born;  
 And, like her true nobility, she has  
 Carried herself towards me.<sup>20</sup>

Such gleams of his better nature show that the king still esteems and respects the queen, but they were becoming more feeble and irregular every day. The queen was aware that she had lost his affections and love. When the lords asked her to let the king handle the situation, she answers:

Put my sick cause into his hands that hates me?  
 Alas, has banished me his bed already,  
 His love, too long ago! I am old my lords,  
 And all the fellowship I hold now with him  
 Is only my obedience.<sup>21</sup>

The obedience of which Katherine speaks is the obedience she owes to her God and husband through her marriage vows. Conscious that she was the king's lawful wife, she knew that a divorce was wrong. No man could break the marriage bond between those whom God has joined together.

My lord, I dare not make myself so guilty,  
 To give up willingly that noble title  
 Your master wed me to: nothing but death  
 Shall ever divorce my dignities.<sup>22</sup>

Her own worth and uprightness has sustained her throughout her trials. In her sufferings she gives evidence of a moral strength that gives her a peace and patience beyond the reach of men's abuse. The integrity, simplicity, and strength of character arising from her just cause enabled her to defend

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21 Ibid., III, 1, 118-122.

22 Ibid., III, 1, 139-142.

herself against the tricks of the prelates. When they asked to speak to her in private, she answers:

Speak it here:

There's nothing I have done yet, o' my conscience,  
Deserves a corner: would all other women  
Could speak this with as free a soul as I do!  
My lords, I care not, so much I am happy  
Above a number, if my actions  
Were tried by every tongue, every eye saw 'em,  
Envy and base opinion set against 'em,  
I know my life so even. If your business  
Seek me out, and that way I am wife in,  
Out with it boldly: truth loves open dealing.<sup>23</sup>

Have I lived this long--let me speak myself,  
Since virtue finds no friends--a wife, a true one?  
A woman, I dare say without vain-glory,  
Never yet branded with suspicion?  
Have I with all my full affections  
Still met the King? loved him next heaven? obeyed him?  
Been, out of fondness, superstitious to him?  
Almost forgot my prayers to content him?  
And am I thus rewarded? 'tis not well, lords,  
Bring me a constant woman to her husband,  
One that ne'er dreamed a joy beyond his pleasure;  
And to that woman, when she has done most,  
Yet, will I add an honour, a great patience.<sup>24</sup>

A woman can use no stronger weapon in defense of her honor than truth. Katherine's words are not colored with poetical figures of speech. A higher degree of eloquence is attained by the simple statements of evident truths. Speaking from a full heart and fighting for everything dear to her, she lets the facts fall quickly from her lips one after another. A tremendous

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23 Ibid., III, i, 29-40.

24 Ibid., III, i, 124-137.

power is felt as these truths, forcefully following one another, strike the listener's ears:

- 1 Before all, even the maid servants or her enemies, she is willing to let anyone accuse her of failing in her duty to her husband in ~~any~~ regard.
- 2 This is not said out of vain-glory but in order to prove that she has always been a true and virtuous wife.
- 3 Is her loyalty even open to suspicion?
- 4 Can anyone accuse her of lack of love and obedience to the king? Or is it not that she has erred in the opposite extreme?
- 5 Did she ever think of any joy which would not bring pleasure to him also?
- 6 To all these virtues can be added a great patience amid sorrows and sufferings.

Here again we find Shakespeare summing up, but in different words, his concept of an ideal wife as portrayed by Katherine. Anyone who admires truth, honors nobility of nature, and respects strength, necessarily will admire, honor, and respect Katherine. Shakespeare was such a man. As a result, her character portrayal can rival the eloquence and beauty of any other Shakespearean heroine.

The last scene of the queen's life is now depicted. In spite of all the force and pressure brought upon her by the king through the cardinals and others to concede her royal rights, she has remained firm in her insistence that she is the king's lawful wife and that in God's eyes it is her duty to remain the same. Finally, no matter what the final outcome of the whole matter should be, she promises that she will always remain devoted to the king. "He has my heart yet; and shall have my prayers While

I shall have life."<sup>25</sup>

The king obtains the divorce and marries Anne. Meanwhile, Katherine is deprived of her daughter's presence and almost of all her friends. Lonely and broken-hearted, her health begins to fail. Her sufferings, endured with such a heroic spirit, have had a purifying and sanctifying effect upon her soul, as all great sorrows do when they are borne with such meekness and resignation. With Christian charity and kindness, she fully forgives Wolsey, "whom I most hated living,...Now in his ashes honour."<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Johnson says of this sadly beautiful death-bed scene that it is

above any other part of Shakespeare's tragedies, and perhaps above any scene of any other poet, tender and pathetic; without gods, or furies, or poisons, or precipices; without the help of romantic circumstances; without improbable sallies of poetical lamentations and without any throes of tumultuous misery.<sup>27</sup>

Another author says

In approaching the last scene of Katherine's life, I feel as if about to tread within a sanctuary, where nothing befits us but silence and tears; veneration so strives with compassion, tenderness with awe.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Ibid, V, i, 179, 180.

26 Ibid, IV, ii, 73.

27 Johnson, as quoted by Jameson, Characteristics of Women, 432.

28 Jameson, 432.

It is a peaceful scene. Katherine, in as much as it was in her power, has fulfilled all her duties as wife and queen most nobly. All her struggles and trials are now near their end. The vision which promises her "eternal happiness"<sup>29</sup> makes one feel that this queen, who has not had a happy moment throughout the entire period that the play covers, at last receives a taste of the rewards she will enjoy in the next life because of her heroic virtues.

In bidding her last farewell to her husband and king, Katherine proclaims that her love and loyalty to him never wavered.

Sir, I most humbly pray you to deliver  
This to my lord the king...  
In which I have commended to his goodness  
The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter:  
The dews of heaven fall thick in blessing on her!  
Beseeching him to give her virtuous breeding, --  
She is young, and of a noble modest nature,  
I hope she will deserve well, --and a little  
To love her for her mother's sake, that loved him,  
Heaven knows how dearly. My next poor petition  
Is, that his noble grace would have some pity  
Upon my wretched women, that so long  
Have follow'd both my fortunes faithfully

...

The last is for my men;...  
That they may have their wages duly paid 'em.  
And something over to remember me by:  
If heaven had pleased to have given me longer life  
And able means, we had not parted thus.  
These are the whole contents and good my lord,  
By that you love the dearest in this world

As you wish Christian peace to souls departed,  
Stand these poor people's friend, and urge the king  
To do me this last right.

...Remember me

In all humility unto his highness:  
Say his long trouble now is passing  
Out of this world; tell him, in death I blessed him,  
For so I will. Mine eyes grow dim. Farewell,  
My lord.<sup>30</sup>

These are words almost too beautiful to be commented on. In bidding farewell she forgets herself in order to plead for her daughter and people. Instead of reproaching the king, she prays for him and even asks his forgiveness for all the trouble she caused him. Katherine has said all in defense of her honor until she could say no more; she has given her all in love for her husband until there was no more to give--except the final and supreme act of love--to lay down her life. This she will do in a few minutes.

But like a queen and faithful wife, she knows right from wrong. Sure, serene, and majestic, she displays the last sparks of the strength and nobility of her nature in her dying words.

When I am dead...

Let me be used with honour: strew me over  
With maiden flowers, that all the world may know  
I was a chaste wife to my grave: embalm me,  
Then lay me forth: although unqueen'd, yet like  
A queen, and daughter to a king, inter me.  
I can no more.<sup>31</sup>

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30 Ibid., IV, ii, 129-164.

31 Ibid., IV, ii, 166-173.

According to historical accounts, no eulogy was permitted to be preached at Katherine's funeral, but Shakespeare redeemed and immortalized her name by this drama. He has painted a beautiful picture of her soul. Like an artist he portrayed more strikingly her beautiful characteristics and softened her less attractive qualities, while he still remained faithful to the model he was painting. He did not, however, like an ordinary artist, paint the beauty of her external features alone, but revealed that which is much more difficult, the beauty of her soul. In so doing, he has lifted up his portrait of her before the world and set it among the greatest masterpieces of art as if to say, "Here is a perfect model of the ideal queen, wife, and mother. I challenge you to find another rival who will excel her!"

In creating Hamlet, Shakespeare painted another picture. This time it is upon Hamlet's heart and soul. It is a portrait of the internal beauty of Hamlet's mother as she appeared to him before her sin, a portrait that rivals and perhaps surpasses the one of Katherine in Shakespeare's mind. Then when this beautiful picture is disfigured, torn, and completely ruined by a filthy and degrading sin, Hamlet's nobler feelings are overcome and choked out by feelings of despair and melancholy.



## CHAPTER V

### FOR THE QUEEN WAS HAMLET'S ANGEL

Like all ages, the Elizabethan Era had its licentiousness, but as it has been pointed out, its ideals of womanhood were lofty. A pure woman was honored and respected precisely because she presented such a contrast to those who brought disgrace and degradation to their sex by surrendering all the qualities that Christian womanhood represented. A refined and cultured Christian would almost instinctively feel a repulsion from a wanton and lustful woman, for her life was in complete contradiction to his Christian principles and ideals of womanhood.

The study of these social conditions and ideals during Shakespeare's age has taken up a good proportion of the thesis so far. This was done in order to substantiate the interpretations that will be given to many lines of Hamlet, for Shakespeare's plays are the expression of very life as he knew and lived it.

Because Hamlet's thoughts often dwell upon his mother's infidelity to her marriage vows, it had to be shown what were the Church's obligations concerning marriage in Shakespeare's time.

Because Hamlet's deep reverence and love of his mother arose from his belief that she was a perfect model of his lofty ideals, the ideals of noble-minded men as Spenser and Shakespeare had to be shown to be lofty. The play concerns a Christian queen's sin and the consequent destruction of her son's ideals; consequently, there was need to show the lives of Christian queens who could and did live up to such high ideals and were perfect models to the women of their realm. As a proof that there were women among the English nobility who lived up to the high ideals, the example of Margaret of Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, and Katherine of Aragon, a queen of England, were used. These historical characters were drawn from sixteenth century England because Hamlet is a play about kings and queens and princes in a Christian country, and the only royalty with which Shakespeare was acquainted was in the English court, the center of all pulsating and surging Renaissance Society.

The relationship between the play Hamlet and the conditions of Shakespeare's contemporary life and ideals appear to be closer than in any other Shakespearean drama. Using Hamlet as his mouth-piece, Shakespeare reveals much of his own character. Hamlet's advice to the players, his satire through Osric on certain affectations of his day, his reference to the children actors--these and other similar incidents reveal Shakespeare's own convictions, sentiments, and reflections on popular topics of the

day. On the other hand Hamlet's famous soliloquies, or his reflections on death through the grave digger's scene give a comprehensive view of Shakespeare's more intimate thoughts, ideals, and principles. There are but few critics who do not agree that "From the rich troops of his heroes, Shakespeare has chosen Hamlet as the exponent, to the spectators and to posterity, of all that lay nearest to his own heart."<sup>1</sup>

Another important factor that makes this drama so close to real life is that Shakespeare himself was suffering a tragic period in his own life about the time when he wrote Hamlet. Many of his closest friends were either imprisoned or put to death on account of the Essex conspiracy. His own life was endangered when his play Richard II was declared treasonable and his company lost favor with the government. Then too, it seems possible that Shakespeare may have been suffering in his personal life some great disappointment or disillusionment at this time. During this period of his life he wrote almost all of his tragedies, and the plot of a number of them as Othello, Troilus and Cressida, Hamlet, and others evolve around a woman's infidelity.

Troilus was not written in the afterweariness of Hamlet, but, ...it is the first reaction to some horrible emotional experience which had the effect on Shakespeare's mind that he afterwards drew so potently in Hamlet's first soliloquy. Later, as the experience became less immediate, partly perhaps through this

<sup>1</sup> H.H. Furness, Hamlet II, Variorum Shakespeare, Philadelphia, 1877, IV, 235.

very expression of it in Troilus, it was mastered--comprehended and evaluated in relation to other elements in life, so that it became one of the major elements in the greater play, which the instinct of all critics has concurred in thinking to be most of all Shakespeare's work the record of his own soul. Troilus is thus the reaction to an experience, Hamlet the transcript of the subjective part of that experience together with, as commentary, the awed deduction of what might have been, but for the grace of God. As to the objective details of the actual events, there is, I am glad to think, no evidence, unless what is indirectly in the Sonnets. Shakespeare had as much right to suffer privately as you or I, and the only objective point that matters is what is indirectly told to us by himself--that it had something to do with a woman. Whether or not she was Mary Fitton, and what precisely were the dirty facts or her disloyalty, is matter for the kind of mind whose pabulum is not Hamlet, but the elaborate biographies of courtesans. What she did to Shakespeare he made our business, and the record of it is in Cressida and Helen and Queen Gertrude, and in the bitterly contemptuous justice that he did Ophelia.<sup>2</sup>

With all this background in mind, let the reader try to think of Hamlet as Shakespeare would have conceived him in his imagination. As a child, Hamlet would have first learned about purity and goodness from his mother, and it would have only been quite natural for him to see these virtues again in his own mother. Then also, as an only child, Hamlet would have been given all the attention and love of his mother, and he in turn would have worshipped her. Gradually his undeveloped mind, like an untouched recording disk, received an impression of his mother's goodness and loveliness which would remain on his mind forever.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Mackenzie, The Women in Shakespeare's Plays, N.Y., 1924, 187.

Hamlet, however, did not reach full manhood in ignorance of the evil of the world. Like any mature young man he knew to what depths of degradation a woman could lower herself by her sinfulness. But the fact that his mother stood out in contrast to so many women as a shining light of all that was good and pure, made him love and reverence her that much more deeply. As a queen and mother she was in Hamlet's mind a perfect model for all the women in her realm to imitate. Because Ophelia lived up to these same ideals, because she possessed the same lovable qualities of simplicity, purity, and goodness, Hamlet also cherished and loved Ophelia as deeply as his mother.

Before his father's death Hamlet was anything but melancholy. He may have been a deep thinker in so far as he judged people and affairs more deeply than their surface appearance, but he certainly could not have been moody. His natural temperament was a happy and cheerful one. His crystal-clear sincerity, his kindness, and his hatred of any type of pretense gave him a winning personality that made him the idol of Denmark. Even Claudius speaks of the "great love the general gender [multitude] bear him,"<sup>3</sup> and says that he was "most generous and free from all contriving."<sup>4</sup> Ophelia, in reference to Hamlet, speaks of:

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3 Hamlet, IV, iv, 18.

4 Ibid, IV, iv, 134.

The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's eyes, tongue, sword;  
 The expectancy and rose of the fair State,  
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
 The observed of all observers.<sup>5</sup>

Hamlet was affectionate by nature. He had a happy and hopeful outlook toward life because he had a beautiful future ahead of him. He had met with small sorrows and disappointments in his life; but as yet, the shadow of a crushing grief had never crossed his path and left any traces of bitterness in him.

It is a different Hamlet that Shakespeare introduces to the reader in the beginning of the play. He is clothed in black and immersed in grief not only because he has come home to find his father dead, but especially because he discovers his mother living in incest with his uncle.

Many people today are comparatively unaffected by the implications attached to an incestuous marriage, but such an act had a shocking effect upon the sincere Christian of Elizabethan times. Shakespeare intended this incestuous marriage to have an important influence upon Hamlet's character, for it is continually being referred to throughout the drama. The thought of it is constantly on Hamlet's mind.

The very first first words of Hamlet in the play are

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5 Ibid., III, i, 151-154.

an aside in which, after the king has called Hamlet his cousin and son, Hamlet ironically replies: "A little more than kin, and less than kind."<sup>6</sup> He is a little more than "kin" because he is now more than a nephew to Claudius; but he is less than "kind" (in its primitive sense of "natural") because his new relation to Claudius as his son is unnatural. It springs from an incestuous marriage, and therefore is unnatural and invalid.

Later when Hamlet is leaving Denmark for England, he bluntly tells Claudius that he does not recognize him as his father because he cannot according to God's law. It happens when Hamlet bids his mother goodbye:

Hamlet: ... Farewell, dear mother.

King: Thy loving father, Hamlet.

Hamlet: My mother: father and mother is man and wife;  
man and wife is one flesh, and so, my mother.  
Come, for England.<sup>7</sup>

To return to the beginning of the play again, Hamlet refuses to acknowledge his filial relationship to Claudius by his words, "A little more than kin, and less than kind." He further emphasized the same thought by his next words. Claudius asks him, "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" Hamlet answers, "Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun"<sup>8</sup> -- an old

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6 Ibid., I, ii, 65.

7 Ibid., IV, iii, 50-54.

8 Ibid., I, ii, 67.

proverbial phrase that signified the state of being ostracized from home and kindred. Hamlet considers himself to have lost both his father, through death, and his mother through her incestuous marriage.

His mother then unconsciously stabs again at his already deeply wounded heart. She says that it is common for people to die, so why should his father's death seem so particular to him? Hamlet knows that death is common, but he also knows that it is common for a wife to mourn the loss of her husband for some length of time afterwards. However, it is most unnatural and uncommon for a wife to cease to mourn for her husband within a month. His mother's behavior in this regard reveals to him that much more clearly the shallowness of her character and her lack of true love for his father.

Claudius gives a pedantic speech about resignation to divine providence. He tries to win Hamlet's friendship by flattery, a thing that only causes Hamlet to despise him that much more. Hamlet now realizes that both his mother and Claudius are incapable of understanding from what cause his griefs arise; so he chooses silence as his only course of action. When alone Hamlet gives utterance to his pent-up feelings.

O that this too, too solid flesh would melt  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!



How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
 Fie on 't! It is an unweeded garden  
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
 Possess it merely.<sup>9</sup>

The explanation that Professor Bradley gives for the words of this soliloquy expresses their meaning perfectly:

Here are a sickness of life and even a longing for death, so intense that nothing stands between Hamlet and suicide except religious awe. And what has caused them? The rest of the soliloquy so thrusts the answer upon us that it might seem impossible to miss it. It was not his father's death; that doubtless brought deep grief, but mere grief for someone loved and lost does not make a noble spirit loathe the world as a place full only of things rank and gross.... It was the moral shock of the sudden ghastly disclosure of his mother's true nature, falling on him when his heart was aching with love, and his body doubtless was weakened with sorrow.<sup>10</sup>

The truth of those words is easily verified by the rest of the soliloquy that reads:

That it should come to this!  
 But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two:  
 So excellent a king; that was to this,  
 Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother  
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!  
 Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,  
 As if increase of appetite had grown  
 By what it fed on; and yet, within a month--  
 Let me not think on 't--Frailty, thy name is woman!--  
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
 With which she followed my poor father's body

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9 Ibid., I, ii, 129-137.

10 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 117.

Like Niobe, all tears,--why she, even she--  
 O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,  
 Would have mourn'd longer--married with my uncle,  
 My father's brother, but no more like my father  
 Than I to Hercules. Within a month?  
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
 She married. O most wicked speed, to post  
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
 It is not, nor it cannot come to good;--  
 But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.<sup>11</sup>

Everything on which Hamlet had based his whole future and had considered the most important as well as the safest and securest things in life, suddenly crumbled and gave way before him, as strong walls and the solid earth would do in an earthquake. What could he grasp now? There was nothing left on which he could rely. If so much of lust and weakness could be found in his own mother, what was there left in the world that was worthwhile? If so great a man as his father had been so easily deceived, how could he be certain that he himself would not be just as easily deceived by some woman?

Within a month of her husband's death the queen rushes like a senseless beast into an incestuous marriage with his uncle. The whole thing has a sickening and poisoning effect upon Hamlet's character. The fact that he keeps this anguish within himself where it can continually lacerate and probe the open

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<sup>11</sup> Hamlet, I, ii, 137-159.

wound, only intensifies and thickens the grief within his paralyzed soul.

Previously he had been devoid of doubt, free from all harassing questions, and living a life that was utterly simplified because his goal was clear and the way to it as open as the skies. Now he found himself deluded, disillusioned, and helpless. He who had been walking a highway as broad as a Roman road and as bright as a cloudless noonday heaven now was groping in a fog that was impenetrable. Never again was Hamlet to know his former peace of soul. The shattering of life-long ideals is too great a disaster to be forgotten in a few weeks, to pass away without leaving an indelible mark upon his soul.

That his mother's conscience should be so blunted by her moral callousness and coarse sensuality as to make her senseless to her open and disgraceful sin, only intensified Hamlet's mental agony. Not only had she sinned through weakness, but her inability to understand Hamlet's grief revealed to him just exactly how fickle and shallow was her character. She had completely destroyed an ideal around which Hamlet's whole life was built, and the most tragic part of it was that she was incapable of realizing what she had done. Hamlet felt forced to say, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue." Indeed, that noble heart does break later, as Horatio in the final scene will confirm, for

no man whose manners had been as open and carefree as the air and whose soul more transparent than pure glass could suddenly assume an entirely different attitude without tragic consequence

A bitter struggle is taking place within Hamlet's soul. Already he is cast into a state of melancholy and disillusionment. This sickness of heart and intense desire for death is present even before Hamlet has any knowledge of his father's murder. Consequently, it cannot be said that the great duty of revenge is the load which presses so heavily upon his agonized soul. The only explanation left is his mother's sin.

In this hour of uttermost weakness, this sinking of his whole being toward annihilation, there comes on him bursting the bonds of the natural world with a shock of astonishment and terror, the revelation of his mother's adultery and his father's murder.<sup>12</sup>

This new information causes Hamlet's grief, confusion, and frustration to reach their greatest depths. His belief that sensuality and lust must inevitably betray human nature is confirmed, strengthened, and intensified. How those words of the ghost, "my most seeming virtuous Queen,"<sup>13</sup> must have bitten into Hamlet's heart. All the goodness, all the saintliness, all the purity, and virtue which he had idolized in his mother so many

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12 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 120.

13 Hamlet, I, v, 47.

years was only "seeming", only a dream. Nor were the words which immediately followed any less painful:

O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!  
From me, whose love was of that dignity,  
That it went hand in hand even with the vow  
I made to her in marriage.<sup>14</sup>

To Hamlet and to his father, marriage vows implied something extremely sacred and holy, but to the queen they had no meaning than "dicers' oaths."<sup>15</sup> The final thought that must have scraped the bottom of Hamlet's grief was that his mother's lust would stoop so low as to "prey on garbage."<sup>16</sup> A person can only guess at the depths of the mental anguish and sufferings within Hamlet's soul that wrung from him the anguished cry: "O most pernicious woman!--O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!"<sup>17</sup>

Hamlet has now lost faith in all mankind, and fears to trust anyone. His deep love for Ophelia undergoes a subtle change. He grows suspicious of her innocence and fidelity. Her unaccountable action of denying him her presence only increases his suspicion and mental bewilderment. In such a state of mind

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14 Ibid., I, v, 48-51.

15 Ibid., III, iv, 45.

16 Ibid., I, v, 58.

17 Ibid., I, v, 106-107.

he rudely bursts into her room in the hope of obtaining sympathy and comfort from her. He studies her to see if he can read her heart and still find love, virtue, loyalty, and if possible, strength enough to be able to share the dread secret which was crushing him to the ground. But her blank stare of fear indicates nothing to him, and he leaves the room more confused and bewildered than when he entered.

It is only when he meets Ophelia again that his suspicions are confirmed. If Hamlet could so quickly read in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's looks what their mission was, how much more easily must he have summed up the situation when he found Ophelia sitting alone in the lobby, reading a prayer book, and having all his love tokens with her. Her very simplicity made it impossible for her to pretend, and every word and action of hers necessarily seemed strange and unnatural to him. She tells a patent lie and does it badly. Of course, she does it for his sake, but he is unaware of her motives and believes she has betrayed him. He thinks that she too has gone over to the enemy's side and considers himself as left entirely alone to fight against his foe. That his mind should become poisoned against all women and that he should be so embittered was only natural. The only two women whom he had ever loved were his mother and Ophelia and these two, who had previously represented to him the best of womankind, were now found to be faithless to him.

Here lies the very heart of the tragedy. Nothing is more tragic in life than to be disappointed and deceived by loved ones. A man often recovers from failure or disgrace in life when there is someone to inspire him on, someone who understands and loves him, someone to whom every word and action of his matters; but the situation is very different in Hamlet's case. The very ones who had been the driving force and inspiration to him throughout his entire life are now the cause of his unhappiness and misery.

Next comes the play scene. One would expect that Hamlet's whole attention would be concentrated on proving the king's guilt. Instead his thoughts frequently wander to the thought of his mother's sin. Ophelia drops a chance remark about the brevity of the prologue. Immediately Hamlet twists the meaning around and uses it for an occasion to comment on the brevity of a woman's love.

Ophelia: 'Tis brief my lord  
 Hamlet: As woman's love.<sup>18</sup>

As the play begins Hamlet seems to ignore Claudius and to center his attention on his mother. Hamlet seems to intend to awaken in his mother by this play the memory of her former life and fidelity as well as to prove Claudius' guilt.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., III, ii, 146.

The player-queen vows eternal love to her husband and swears even if he were to die, she would never love another. As proof of her love she calls upon heaven to rain down all kinds of curses upon her if she is not loyal to this vow. Hamlet remarks here, "If she should break it now!"<sup>19</sup>

Hamlet laps into silence again while the player-queen continues to pledge her loyalty. Then Hamlet suddenly asks his mother, "Madam, how like you this play?"<sup>20</sup>

Having learned from her troubled looks and restlessness, that she recognized herself in the Player-queen, he now suddenly turns upon her and startles her by the suddenness and vehemence of his sarcastic question, "Madam, how like you this play?" His question was a shaft barbed with bitter irony, which quickened the memory of her infidelity to his loving father. Gertrude in surprise, falters for the moment at the fierce utterance, only to reply, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." These telltale words of covered guilt prove that she has recognized in the Player-queen her own faithless love; and Hamlet, mindful of her disdain to mourn the memory of his honored father and of her shameful hasty marriage, shoots another shaft steeped in ridicule and raillery, in the words "O, but she'll keep her word."<sup>21</sup>

All these remarks point to one conclusion, that Hamlet even in his state of disillusionment was still hoping to make his mother conscious of her grievous sin and to repent. When Ophelia quietly comments on Hamlet's condition as, "Still better and

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20 Ibid., III, ii, 224.

21 Blackmore, Riddles of Hamlet, 296.



worse," he quickly replies, "So you must take your husbands."<sup>22</sup> It is another reference to the marriage vow: "I promise to take thee for my lawful husband...for better for worse..." Thus even at this crucial moment of the play-scene his mother's sin seems to keep haunting his memory. He just could not forget it.

Perhaps the most important scene in the drama is the interview between Hamlet and his mother. He is still in a passionate mood when he prepares to meet his mother. Like a true Christian, however, he prays that he may show anger at her sins but only love toward her person.

I will speak daggers to her, but use none;  
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:  
How in my words soever she be shent, [injure]  
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!"<sup>23</sup>

Although Hamlet is intent upon revenging his father's murder, still his mind is constantly occupied with the thought of his mother's sinfulness and her complete indifference to the scandal she was causing. This idea always seems to be uppermost in his mind, as if his religious principles were continually telling him that the salvation of his mother's soul was of more importance than revenge for his father's murder. Somehow, Hamlet hopes he can so make his mother conscious of her sinful life

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<sup>22</sup> Hamlet, III, ii, 242.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., III, ii, 383-386.

so as to cause her to repent and change her way of life.

When his mother rebukes him, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended," he quickly puts her on the defensive by replying, "Mother, you have my father much offended."<sup>24</sup> When she asks if he remembers her, he more openly and boldly reveals her sin by replying, "You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife." There is a pause; then comes the line that reveals what shameful, heart-rendering, and painful effects her sins have had on him: "And--would it were not so!--you are my mother."<sup>25</sup> For a queen to live an open incestuous life to the scandal of all was shameful and disgraceful; but for that queen to be his own mother who had been the incarnation of his highest ideals, was an unbearable grief to Hamlet. He would have preferred to be motherless.

Still he felt it his duty to bring his mother back to the state of grace, no matter how painful a task it might be. He tells her that he intends to hold a mirror up to her soul so that she may see its blackness. "You go not till I set you up a glass Where you may see the inmost part of you."<sup>26</sup> He tells her

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24 Ibid., III, iv, 9-10.

25 Ibid., III, iv, 16.

26 Ibid., III, iv, 19-20.

Leave wringing of your hands: peace! sit you down,  
 And let me wring your heart: for so I shall  
 If it be made of penetrable stuff;  
 If damned custom have not brass'd it so,  
 That it is proof and bulwark against sense.<sup>27</sup>

The queen asks, "What have I done, that thou dar'est wag  
 thy tongue In noise so rude against me?" The queen still remain  
 or pretends to remain impervious to a sense of guilt and shame.  
 This irritates Hamlet the more. What has she done? He replies:

Such an act  
 That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;  
 Calls virtue hypocrite; takes off the rose  
 From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
 And sets a blister there; makes marriage-vows  
 As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed  
 As from the body of contraction plucks  
 The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
 A rhapsody of words! heaven's face doth glow;  
 Yea, this solidity and compound mass  
 With tristful visage, as against the doom  
 Is thought-sick at the act.<sup>28</sup>

The queen has sinned against purity, despised virtue,  
 removed the rose of love from the forehead and put a blister  
 here, (an allusion to an old custom of branding harlots on the  
 forehead.) Such an infraction of the marriage vows remove the  
 very soul from the marriage contract and leaves it a lifeless  
 body which will quickly decay and perish. Such infidelity makes  
 religion and its obligations nothing else but pious sentiment-

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27 Ibid., III, iv, 34-38.

28 Ibid., III, iv, 39-51.

ality. Heaven and earth even seem to be stricken with grief and horror at her sin, as though the day of judgment were at hand.

Hamlet throws all those accusations against his mother. When she still pretends to be ignorant of what he means and of the cause of his anger, Hamlet draws a comparison between his father and Claudius, and he then asks what devil caused her to prefer Claudius to his father. He cries out:

O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious Hell,  
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,  
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,  
And melt in her own fire; proclaim no shame  
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,  
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
And reason panders will.<sup>29</sup>

At last the queen admits her guilt and that she had always been aware that she was living in sin, for she says,

O Hamlet, speak no more!  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct.<sup>30</sup>

At this first sign of her repentance and confession of her sins, Hamlet's violent feelings and passions are calmed. He now no longer bitterly condemns her, but with filial tenderness pleads with her to change her way of life. Like a priest, Hamlet has struggled violently to win back his mother's soul from the

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29 Ibid., III, iv, 82-88.

30 Ibid., III, iv, 88-91.

devil, and only after a long and bitter conflict was the enemy forced to yield ground. Hamlet is quick to grasp this opportunity and he bids his mother,

Confess yourself to Heaven;  
Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;  
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,  
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue;  
For in the fatness of these pursy times  
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,  
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.<sup>31</sup>

The crisis of the conflict has been reached. As sudden rays of sunshine will break through the black clouds after a violent storm, so the queen after her previous display of base sensuality once again shows nobility of soul when she says, "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain." Hamlet replies,

O throw away the worser part of it  
And live the purer with the other half.<sup>32</sup>

Simple, yet so full of meaning, these words contain a most eloquent appeal. After their bitter quarrel in which their deep love for each other was crucified and purified in pain, this sudden burst of faith and love comes as a soothing relief to both

Tears of sorrow replace the queen's former arrogance. She humbly bows her head in shame and contrition and asks, "What

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31 Ibid., III, iv, 149-155.

32 Ibid., III, iv, 156-158.

shall I do?"<sup>33</sup> Hamlet advises her to avoid further sin by keeping away from the king's bed, and if necessary, even to assume virtue that she does not have. Hamlet asks her forgiveness for having had to speak to her as he did. Also he asks her to forgive his omitting the filial act of receiving her blessing. This he considered impossible for she was not as yet in the state of grace. He then bids his mother good-night.

Such an estranged relationship between a mother and son who love each other so deeply is matter for the deepest pathos. She is hurt by the loss of her son's respect as well as shamed by her sin, and Hamlet finds it extremely painful openly to charge his mother with her sin. But whereas his whole heart was never in the task of seeking revenge for his father's murder, it was in his horror at his mother's fall and in his longing to lift her up again. Nor does his conduct appear unduly harsh if:

we recall his filial love, which, intensified supremely by the lofty idealization of his mother's character, had been lacerated by her shameful conduct; if we consider his own nature, so highly sensitive to moral good and evil that, enamored of the one and abhorrent of the other, he feels a revulsion of soul at the disgraceful state of one so near and dear to him; if we reflect upon his own understanding of his duty of "revenge", a duty, which comprises not only the punishment of the usurper, by depriving him of life, crown, and Queen, but, moreover, the awakening of his mother's

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33 Ibid., III, iv, 180.

soul to a sense of her shameful guilt, in order to restore her to her former virtuous self: it seems evident that his conduct, far from being undutiful and harsh, is, on the contrary, clearly prompted by his strong filial love for an idol, which, though basely shattered, he is anxious to upgather, and, by induing it anew with his own esteem of virtue and of honor, to restore it to its lost dignity and splendor. Hence, his supreme filial love and sense of duty makes him the physician of her soul,--makes him apply the one sole remedy which, however painful, can alone revive her from a moribund state, and save her from a disgraceful moral death.<sup>34</sup>

Shakespeare leaves us uncertain whether the queen returned to her sin or not, but with her dying breath in the closing scene she shows that her maternal love did finally conquer her sensual love when she turns against her husband and warns her "dear Hamlet" not to drink the poisoned wine.

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34 Blackmore, Riddles of Hamlet, 331.

## EPILOGUE

Quiller-Couch, Hazlit, Coleridge, Victor Hugo, and other commentators say that Hamlet has a greater universal appeal than any other Shakespearean tragedy because each spectator in beholding Hamlet feels, "This is I!" This explanation may be true but it is not sufficient. The success and popularity of any tragedy depends upon its power to make the spectator identify himself with the protagonist. The real reason for the perennial popularity of Hamlet lies in the explanation of why a person will more naturally and perfectly identify himself with the character of Hamlet rather than with Othello, Macbeth, or some other protagonist. None of the commentators, however, attempt to explain it that deeply. Nevertheless, if we accept the explanation in the foregoing chapters for the actions of Hamlet, we can search more deeply into the reasons why we will more readily identify ourselves with Hamlet rather than with Macbeth or Othello.

Macbeth, in opposition to all his other fine qualities of nobility, has a tragic trait that is repulsive to us even though it may be a very human fault. The same may be said for Othello or any other tragic hero. In Hamlet this is not true.



His tragic trait grew out of the goodness of his nature. The nobleness of Hamlet's moral nature made him judge the rest of humanity in the same light. He knew that there were evils and rottenness in the world, but the closer a person was to him, the more he judged that person's moral nature to be as pure and noble as his own. He had chosen his friends according to their moral worth and not according to any external impression. However, his own high principles and ideals caused him to overlook the weakness of human nature and to put too great a trust in its moral strength.

The reason why most of us say, "We are Hamlet," is that almost all of us have been guilty of this same fault. Because our Christian principles give us such high ideals and assure us that it is possible for human nature with the help of God's grace to reach them we go to the other extreme. We overlook the fact that human nature is also weak. We begin to rely too much on it; and as this reliance continually grows stronger it causes us to expect too much from a friend or loved one. Then at some crucial moment we find human nature wanting. Disillusionment at last comes. Sometimes this disappointment may manifest itself in only a trivial fault--a slight, a mean word, crankiness, or thoughtlessness by the loved one; yet, it is enough to make us realize the imperfection of human nature and its inability to satisfy fully the love that is in our hearts.

The presence of this tragedy in our lives, whether it be on a grand or small scale, is what makes us identify ourselves so perfectly with Hamlet. He is the universal type of our endless anxiety when we, stripped of the delusive hopes of the present life and harassed by the personal sense of our helplessness are brought alone face to face with the mysterious world of destiny. Like Hamlet, we are confronted with the problem of changing our standard of values.

Shakespeare seems to have sensed that he touched upon the great tragedy of life in this drama. In order to put his audience at rest again, he realized that it was necessary to do what he had refused to do in any other tragedy--to mention the future life in the closing scene. Consequently, Hamlet not only perfectly reflects the universal restlessness of man and his longing for perfect love, but he also teaches us where the solution to the difficulty lies.

There is a moral victory in this fatal tragedy. Out of the material ruins, a grander spiritual character arises. Hamlet exchanges his former standards of values for truer ones. Instead of building on the shifting sands of human nature as before, he now builds on rock and relies on the "divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will."<sup>1</sup> His sufferings

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlet, V, ii, 10-11.

have detached him from this world and its vanities. Through painful disappointments he realizes the truth of St. Augustine's words, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in Thee."<sup>2</sup> Having been thus purified, Hamlet is ready for his heavenly reward, and Horatio says as he dies,

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.<sup>3</sup>

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2 The Confessions of St. Augustine, London, 1895, 1.

3 Hamlet, V, ii, 353.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Charles J. Cagney, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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